

Official Report of the
One Hundred Seventy-fifth
Annual General

CONFERENCE

of The Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints

held in the Conference Center
Salt Lake City, Utah

April 2 and 3, 2005

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Report of the 175th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The 175th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints convened in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, on Saturday, April 2, 2005, at 10:00 a.m.

The general sessions of the conference were held at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, April 2 and 3, 2005. The general priesthood session was held on Saturday, April 2, at 6:00 p.m.

President Gordon B. Hinckley presided at all sessions of the conference. He conducted the Sunday morning session. President Thomas S. Monson conducted the Saturday afternoon, priesthood, and Sunday afternoon sessions. President James E. Faust conducted the Saturday morning session.

The conference was carried by satellite transmission to thousands of Church buildings in many countries. In areas that did not receive this transmission, videotapes of the conference were sent to local distribution centers and made available to all Church units. In addition, television and radio stations and the LDS Radio Network carried portions or all of the general sessions to large audiences throughout North America. The proceedings were also broadcast live over the Internet.

General Authorities

First Presidency: Gordon B. Hinckley, Thomas S. Monson, and James E. Faust

Quorum of the Twelve Apostles: Boyd K. Packer, L. Tom Perry, Russell M. Nelson, Dallin H. Oaks, M. Russell Ballard, Joseph B. Wirthlin, Richard G. Scott, Robert D. Hales, Jeffrey R. Holland, Henry B. Eyring, Dieter F. Uchtdorf, and David A. Bednar

Presidency of the Seventy: Earl C. Tingey, D. Todd Christofferson, David E. Sorensen, Charles Didier, Merrill J. Bateman, John H. Groberg, and Robert C. Oaks

First Quorum of the Seventy: Carlos H. Amado, Neil L. Andersen, Monte J. Brough, Sheldon F. Child, L. Whitney Clayton, Gary J. Coleman, Spencer J. Condie, Gene R. Cook, Quentin L. Cook, Claudio R. M. Costa, Benjamin De Hoyos, Robert K. Dellenbach, John B. Dickson, David F. Evans, Christoffel Golden Jr., Walter F. González, C. Scott Grow, Bruce C. Hafen, Donald L. Hallstrom, F. Melvin Hammond, Harold G. Hillam, Richard G. Hinckley, F. Burton Howard, Jay E. Jensen, Marlin K. Jensen, Kenneth Johnson, Paul V. Johnson, W. Rolfe Kerr, Yoshihiko Kikuchi, Paul E. Koelliker, John M. Madsen, Richard J. Maynes, Lynn A. Mickelsen, Dennis B. Neuenschwander, Glenn L. Pace, Paul B. Pieper, Bruce D. Porter, Carl B. Pratt, Ronald A. Rasband, Lynn G. Robbins, Cecil O. Samuelson Jr., Steven E. Snow, Ulisses Soares, Francisco J. Viñas, Lance B. Wickman, and W. Craig Zwick

Second Quorum of the Seventy: Mervyn B. Arnold, Douglas L. Callister, Craig C. Christensen, Shirley D. Christensen, Darwin B. Christenson, Adhemar Damiani, James M. Dunn, Daryl H. Garn, D. Rex Gerratt, H. Aldridge Gillespie, Ronald T. Halverson, Keith K. Hilbig, Spencer V. Jones, Won Yong Ko, Gerald N. Lund, Clate W. Mask Jr., Dale E. Miller, Robert F. Orton, Stephen B. Oveson, William W. Parmley, Wolfgang H. Paul, Wayne S. Peterson, H. Bryan Richards, Ned B. Roueché, R. Conrad Schultz, W. Douglas Shumway, Dennis E. Simmons, Lowell M. Snow, Donald L. Staheli, Robert R. Steuer, David R. Stone, H. Bruce Stucki, Paul K. Sybrowsky, William R. Walker, Robert J. Whetten, Richard H. Winkel, Robert S. Wood, and H. Ross Workman

Presiding Bishopric: H. David Burton, Richard C. Edgley, and Keith B. McMullin

SATURDAY MORNING SESSION

The first session of the 175th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints convened in the Conference Center in Salt Lake City, Utah, at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, April 2, 2005. President James E. Faust conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir, and Richard Elliott and John Longhurst were the organists. To begin this session, the choir sang "Come, Listen to a Prophet's Voice." President Faust then made the following remarks.

President James E. Faust

We welcome you to this, the first general session of the 175th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Faust, conduct this session.

We acknowledge the General Authorities seated on the stand in the Conference Center and Assembly Hall and likewise acknowledge the Relief Society, Young Men, Young Women, Sunday School, and Primary general presidencies in attendance at this conference.

We extend a special welcome to government, education, and civic leaders who are present with us.

We are grateful to the owners and operators of the many television and radio stations and satellite and cable systems, for offering their facilities as a public service to bring this conference to a large audience in many areas of the world. We are also pleased to make these proceedings available by Internet at lds.org.

The music for this session will be by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg, with Richard Elliott and John Longhurst at the organ.

The choir opened this session by singing "Come, Listen to a Prophet's Voice" and will now favor us with "Redeemer of Israel." The invocation will then be offered by Elder Earl C. Tingey of the Presidency of the Seventy.

The choir sang "Redeemer of Israel."

Elder Earl C. Tingey offered the invocation.

President Faust

We shall now be pleased to hear from our beloved prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley. Following President Hinckley's remarks, the choir will sing "God Loved Us, So He Sent His Son."

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Remembering Pope John Paul II

My beloved brothers and sisters, on behalf of the worldwide membership of this Church, I extend to our Catholic neighbors and friends our heartfelt sympathy at this time of great sorrow. Pope John Paul II has worked tirelessly to advance the cause of Christianity, to lift the burdens of the poor, and to speak fearlessly in behalf

of moral values and human dignity. He will be greatly missed, particularly by the very many who have looked to him for leadership.

Accounting of stewardship for past 10 years

Now, my brothers and sisters, I think it appropriate that in opening this conference I give a few words of accountability

concerning our stewardship during the past 10 years.

On March 12, 1995, there was bestowed upon us the high and sacred responsibility of the Presidency.

In the conference that followed I made this statement:

“Now, my brethren and sisters, the time has come for us to stand a little taller, to lift our eyes and stretch our minds to a greater comprehension and understanding of the grand millennial mission of this, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This is a season to be strong. It is a time to move forward without hesitation, knowing well the meaning, the breadth, and the importance of our mission. It is a time to do what is right regardless of the consequences that might follow. It is a time to be found keeping the commandments. It is a season to reach out with kindness and love to those in distress and to those who are wandering in darkness and pain. It is a time to be considerate and good, decent and courteous toward one another in all of our relationships—in other words, to become more Christlike” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1995, 95; *Ensign*, May 1995, 71).

You must be the judge of how far we have come in realizing the fulfillment of that invitation given 10 years ago.

A remarkable flowering of the work

This past decade has been a wonderful season in the history of the Church. There has been a remarkable flowering of the work. There have been many meaningful accomplishments.

This forward thrust is not the work of the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve, the Seventy, or the Presiding Bishopric alone. It is the result of the faith, the prayers, the efforts, the dedicated service of every member of a stake presidency or high council; of every bishopric and quorum presidency; of every auxiliary presidency; and of every faithful, active member of the Church across the world.

To each of you, wherever you may be, I express the feelings of my heart and thank you for your great and dedicated service. What wonderful people you are.

The majesty and the wonder of the gospel of Jesus Christ restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith shine today with resplendent luster.

Great growth of the Church

As we stand on the summit of these years and look back, we must never feel arrogant or proud, but we can feel humbly grateful for what has been accomplished in a variety of undertakings.

For instance, the Church has grown across the world until our membership outside of North America exceeds that in North America. We have become a great international family scattered through 160 nations.

In these past 10 years, more than 500 new stakes have been created and more than 4,000 new wards and branches. Three million new members have been added.

The enrollment in our education system has doubled, increasing by approximately 200,000. For the most part, our youth are stronger and more faithful.

The Perpetual Education Fund has been created. We started with nothing but hope and faith. Today nearly 18,000 young people are being assisted. They live in 27 different nations. They are being trained and are moving out of the slough of poverty in which they and their forebears have lived for generations. Their skills are being refined and their earnings multiplied.

We have greatly increased the number of temples. In 1995 there were 47. Today there are 119, with three more to be dedicated this year.

The Book of Mormon was had in 87 languages in 1995. Today it is available in 106 languages.

Fifty-one million copies of the Book of Mormon have been distributed during these past 10 years.

We have constructed literally thousands of buildings across the earth. They are of a better quality and more suitable to our needs than those previously built.

In addition, we have constructed this remarkable hall from which we speak today, the unique and beautiful Conference Center here in Salt Lake City.

With all of this and much more, we have reached out across the earth to assist those in distress and need wherever they may be. In the last 10 years we have supplied in cash and commodities hundreds of millions of dollars in humanitarian aid to those not of our faith.

We have traveled the earth bearing witness of this, the work of the Almighty. During these same years I personally have traveled nearly a million miles, visiting some 70 countries. My beloved companion traveled with me until a year ago, when she passed away on the 6th of April. It has been lonely since then.

A marvelous future

Our hope concerning the future is great and our faith is strong. We know that we have scarcely scratched the surface of that which will come to pass in the years that lie ahead.

I am now in my 95th year. I never dreamed that I would live this long. My life reminds me of a sign that hung by a rusty staple to a run-down barbed-wire fence in Texas. It read:

Burned out by drought,
Drowned out by flud waters,
Et out by jackrabbits,
Sold out by sheriff,
Still here!

I hope to have the privilege of associating with you, my beloved friends and co-workers, for as long as the Lord permits. And I hope that service will be acceptable.

Stand a little taller

Our foundation is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The authority of the holy priesthood is here, restored under the hands of those who received it directly from our Lord. The curtains have been parted, and the God of heaven and His Beloved Son have spoken to the boy prophet Joseph in opening this last and final dispensation.

Our burden in going forward is tremendous. But our opportunity is glorious.

I now repeat what I said 10 years ago: let us “stand a little taller, . . . lift our eyes and stretch our minds to a greater comprehension and understanding of the grand millennial mission of this, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”

This, my brothers and sisters, is my invitation to you this morning. I extend my love, my blessing, and my gratitude as we open this great conference. May the Spirit of the Lord direct all that occurs is my humble prayer, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang “God Loved Us, So He Sent His Son.”

President Faust

We shall now hear from President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, after which Bishop Richard C. Edgley of the Presiding Bishopric will address us. The choir and congregation will then sing “Come, Ye Children of the Lord.”

We shall then be pleased to hear from Sister Coleen K. Menlove, Primary general president. Following her remarks, Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will address us. The choir will then sing “Teach Me to Walk in the Light.”

President Boyd K. Packer

The keystone of our religion

Joseph Smith said, “I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book” (Book of Mormon introduction; see also *History of the Church*, 4:461).

The first edition of the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ came off the press in Palmyra, New York, in March of 1830. Joseph Smith—an uneducated country boy—had just passed his 24th birthday. The year before he had spent a total of about 65 days translating the plates. Almost half of it was after he had received the priesthood. The printing had taken seven months.

Receiving a spiritual witness of the book

When I first read the Book of Mormon from cover to cover, I read the promise that if I “would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if [the things I had read were] true; and if [I would] ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he [would] manifest the truth of it unto [me], by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 10:4). I tried to follow those instructions as I understood them.

If I expected a glorious manifestation to come at once as an overpowering experience, it did not happen. Nevertheless, it felt good, and I began to believe.

The next verse has an even greater promise: “By the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of *all* things” (Moroni 10:5; italics added). I did not know how the Holy Ghost worked, even though the Book of Mormon explains it a number of times in a number of ways.

I studied and learned that “angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost;

wherefore, they speak the words of Christ.” It said, as well, that one is to “feast upon the words of Christ,” with the promise that “the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:3).

And it says plainly that “if ye cannot understand . . . it will be because ye ask not, neither do ye knock” (2 Nephi 32:4).

I also read, “If ye will enter in by the way, and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do” (2 Nephi 32:5). I had already done that when I was confirmed a member of the Church by the “laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Articles of Faith 1:4).

If I had expected in my little-boy innocence some special spiritual experience, it had not happened. Over the years as I listened to sermons and lessons and read in the Book of Mormon, I began to understand.

Nephi had been very badly treated by his brothers and reminded them that an angel had spoken unto them, “but ye were past feeling, that ye could not feel his words” (1 Nephi 17:45). When I understood that the Holy Ghost could communicate through our feelings, I understood why the words of Christ, whether from the New Testament or the Book of Mormon or the other scriptures, carried such a good feeling. In time I found that the scriptures had answers to things I needed to know.

Learning to liken the scriptures

I read, “Now these are the words, and ye may liken them unto you and unto *all* men” (2 Nephi 11:8; italics added; see also 1 Nephi 19:23–24; 2 Nephi 6:5; 11:2). I took that to mean that the scriptures are likened to me personally, and that is true of everyone else.

When a verse I had passed over several times took on personal meaning, I thought whoever wrote that verse had a deep and

mature understanding of my life and how I felt.

For example, I read that the prophet Lehi partook of the fruit of the tree of life and said, “Wherefore, I began to be desirous that my family should partake of it also; for I knew that it was desirable above all other fruit” (1 Nephi 8:12). I had read that more than once. It did not mean much to me.

The prophet Nephi also said that he had written “the things of my soul . . . for the learning and the profit of my children” (2 Nephi 4:15). I had read that before, and it did not mean all that much to me either. But later when we had children, I understood that both Lehi and Nephi felt just as deeply about their children as we feel about our children and grandchildren.

Plain and precious insights

I found these scriptures to be plain and precious. I wondered how young Joseph Smith could have such insights. The fact is I do not believe he had such penetrating insights. He did not have to have them. He just translated what was written on the plates.

Such plain and precious insights are everywhere in the Book of Mormon. They reflect a depth of wisdom and experience that is certainly not characteristic of a 23-year-old.

I learned that anyone, anywhere, could read in the Book of Mormon and receive inspiration.

Some insights came after reading a second, even a third time and seemed to be “likened” to what I faced in everyday life.

Insight about war and defending the family

I mention another plain and precious insight that did not come with the first reading in the Book of Mormon. When I was 18 years old, I was inducted into the military. While I had no reason to wonder

about it before, I became very concerned if it was right for me to go to war. In time I found my answer in the Book of Mormon:

“They [the Nephites] were not fighting for monarchy nor power but they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church.

“And they were doing that which they felt was the duty which they owed to their God; for the Lord had said unto them, and also unto their fathers, that: Inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies.

“And again, the Lord has said that: Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed. Therefore for this cause were the Nephites contending with the Lamanites, to defend themselves, and their families, and their lands, their country, and their rights, and their religion” (Alma 43:45–47).

Knowing this, I could serve willingly and with honor.

Insight about walking by faith

Another example: We once had a major decision to make. When our prayers left us uncertain, I went to see Elder Harold B. Lee. He counseled us to proceed. Sensing that I was still very unsettled, he said, “The problem with you is you want to see the end from the beginning.” Then he quoted this verse from the Book of Mormon: “Dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith” (Ether 12:6).

He added, “You must learn to walk a few steps ahead into the darkness, and then the light will turn on and go before you.” That was a life-changing experience from one verse in the Book of Mormon.

Insight about weak things becoming strong

Haven’t you felt at times like Nephi, who said, “I was led by the Spirit, not

knowing beforehand the things which I should do"? (1 Nephi 4:6). Haven't you at times felt very weak?

Moroni felt weak and afraid that they "shall mock at our words [because of our weakness].

"... The Lord spake unto [him], saying: Fools mock, but they shall mourn; and my grace is sufficient for the meek, that they shall take no advantage of your weakness;

"And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for *all* men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them" (Ether 12:25–27; italics added).

Life moves all too fast. When you feel weak, discouraged, depressed, or afraid, open the Book of Mormon and read. Do not let too much time pass before reading a verse, a thought, or a chapter.

Testimony of the book may come gradually

My experience has been that a testimony does not burst upon us suddenly. Rather, it grows, as Alma said, from a seed of faith. "It will strengthen your faith: for ye will say I know that this is a good seed; for behold it sprouteth and beginneth to grow" (Alma 32:30). If you nourish it, it will grow; and if you do not nourish it, it will wither (see Alma 32:37–41).

Do not be disappointed if you have read and reread and yet have not received a powerful witness. You may be somewhat like the disciples spoken of in the Book of Mormon who were filled with the power of God in great glory "and they knew it not" (3 Nephi 9:20).

Do the best you can. Think of this verse: "See that all these things are done in wisdom and order; for it is not requisite that a man should run faster than he has strength. And again, it is expedient that he

should be diligent, that thereby he might win the prize; therefore, all things must be done in order" (Mosiah 4:27).

Miracles have not ceased

The spiritual gifts described in the Book of Mormon are present in the Church today—promptings, impressions, revelations, dreams, visions, visitations, miracles. You can be sure that the Lord can, and at times does, manifest Himself with power and great glory. Miracles can occur.

Mormon said:

"Has the day of miracles ceased?

"Or have angels ceased to appear unto the children of men? Or has he withheld the power of the Holy Ghost from them? Or will he, so long as time shall last, or the earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof to be saved?

"Behold I say unto you, Nay; for it is by faith that miracles are wrought" (Moroni 7:35–37).

Pray always—alone and with your family. Answers will come in many ways.

The Book of Mormon gives protection

A few words or a phrase in a verse, such as "wickedness never was happiness" (Alma 41:10), will tell you of the reality of the evil one and how he works.

"For after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him" (Moroni 7:17).

Generations of the prophets taught the doctrines of the everlasting gospel to protect "the peaceable followers of Christ" (Moroni 7:3).

Mormon saw our day. He issued this warning: "Except the Lord doth chasten his people with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him" (Helaman 12:3).

Naming the Lord's Church

When the Lord visited the Nephites, they asked what they should “call this church; for there [were] disputations among the people concerning this matter.

“... The Lord said unto them: ... why is it that the people should murmur and dispute because of this thing?

“Have they not read the scriptures, which say ye must take upon you the name of Christ, which is my name? For by this name shall ye be called at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:3–5).

Central purpose is to testify of Christ

The central purpose of the Book of Mormon is its testament of Jesus Christ. Of more than 6,000 verses in the Book of Mormon, far more than half refer directly to Him.

So, “we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:26).

An endless treasure of wisdom

The Book of Mormon is an endless treasure of wisdom and inspiration, of counsel and correction, “adapted to the capacity of the weak and the weakest [among us]” (D&C 89:3). At once it is rich in nourishment for the most learned if they will humble themselves (see 2 Nephi 9:28–29).

From the Book of Mormon we learn about:

The plan of salvation, or “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8; see also Alma 42:5, 12, 30).

The doctrine of Christ and the Atonement (see 2 Nephi 31:2–21; 32:1–6; 3 Nephi 11:31–40; 27:13–21).

Why death is necessary (see 2 Nephi 9:4–6; Mosiah 16:8–9; Alma 12:25–27).

Life after death in the spirit world (see Alma 40:11–14).

The workings of the evil one (see 2 Nephi 2:27; Alma 28:13; 3 Nephi 2:2).

The order of the priesthood (see Mosiah 29:42; Alma 4:20; 5:3, 44; Alma 13:1–10).

Sacramental prayers (see Moroni 4:3; 5:2).

A sure way to judge between good and evil (see Moroni 7:16).

How to retain a remission of your sins (see Mosiah 4:26).

Clear, prophetic warnings and many, many other things pertaining to the redemption of man and to our lives. All are parts of the fulness of the gospel (see D&C 20:9).

The Book of Mormon confirms the teachings of the Old Testament. It confirms the teachings of the New Testament. It restores “many plain and precious things” (1 Nephi 13:28) lost or taken from them (see also 1 Nephi 13:20–42; 14:23). It is in truth another testament of Jesus Christ.

A powerful defense of the Prophet Joseph

This year we celebrate the 175th anniversary of the organization of the Church and the 200th anniversary of the birth of the Prophet Joseph Smith. In the Church, much will be written and said to honor him.

As usual there will be much said and written to discredit him. There always were, are now, and ever will be those who stir into 200-year-old dust, hoping to find something Joseph is alleged to have said or done in order to demean him.

The revelations tell us of “those that shall lift up the heel against mine anointed, saith the Lord, and cry they have sinned when they have not sinned before me, saith the Lord, but have done that which was meet in mine eyes, and which I commanded them” (D&C 121:16). They face very stern penalties indeed.

We do not have to defend the Prophet Joseph Smith. The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ will defend him for us. Those who reject Joseph Smith as a prophet and revelator are left to find some other explanation for the Book of Mormon; and for the second powerful defense, the Doctrine and Covenants; and

a third, the Pearl of Great Price. Published in combination, these scriptures form an unshakable testament that Jesus is the Christ and a witness that Joseph Smith is a prophet.

And I join the millions of others who have that testimony, and bear it to you in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Bishop Richard C. Edgley

A professor's excitement for the gospel

In 1995 I was invited to give a welcome and some opening remarks at a scientific seminar in Salt Lake City on the subject of child nutrition. Ninety-six scientists from 24 countries attended. As I surveyed the audience during my remarks, I was impressed by the many nations represented, as evidenced by their dress, skin color, language, and other distinguishing features.

Three or four months later I attended a stake conference on the East Coast of the United States. As I sat on the stand in preparation for the priesthood leadership session, an African man entered the chapel and sat down by the aisle. He looked vaguely familiar, but I couldn't remember where I might have seen him. I leaned over and asked the stake president who the man was. The stake president answered, "Oh, he is not a member of the Church. He is a visiting professor from Africa teaching at a prestigious university in the area. A few months ago he attended some kind of scientific seminar in Salt Lake City. He picked up a pamphlet about the Church, which led him to read everything he could find about the Church. He now attends every meeting possible." Half in jest, the stake president then said, "I would be surprised if he were not attending Relief Society meetings."

After the priesthood leadership meeting, I reintroduced myself to the visiting professor. He affirmed his excitement for this newly discovered source of truth. He explained that his family, still in Africa, was studying with the missionaries and would be joining him in America in about four weeks, at which time they would all be baptized together.

At the conclusion of the Saturday evening adult session, this man came rushing to the podium and, thumping his chest, excitedly declared, "My heart is throbbing just like this. I can hardly contain it in my body. I don't know if I can wait the four weeks for my family to be baptized." I suggested he ought to slow down his heart and wait for his wife and children so all could be baptized together.

A still, small voice and a throbbing heart

When Elijah was fleeing for his life from the wicked Phoenician princess Jezebel, the Lord directed him to a high mountain, where he had a most unusual experience. As Elijah stood upon the mount before the Lord, he felt "a great and strong wind . . . ; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice" (1 Kings 19:11-12).

Reasons the Church grows

I am occasionally asked by those not of our faith why it is that our Church grows so rapidly, in both membership and activity, while other churches are reportedly declining in both. The answer to that question is simply a still, small voice and then a throbbing heart. In this busy, tumultuous, and noisy world, it is not like a wind, it is not like a fire, it is not like an earthquake; but it is a still, small, but very discernible voice, and it causes a throbbing heart. It is a quiet burning within that this is the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, with all of its doctrine, priesthood, and covenants that had been lost through the many centuries of darkness and confusion. Yes, it is a still, small voice and a throbbing heart that testifies of the miracle of the Restoration.

Motivation to serve and sacrifice

It is a still, small voice and a throbbing heart that motivates millions of members to emulate the life of Jesus in word, deed, and service. It is a still, small voice and a throbbing heart that motivates thousands of retired couples to serve missions, usually for 18 months or longer. They put aside the comforts of life to go into the world, serving others at their own expense and at what some would consider substantial sacrifice, often serving in remote parts of the world where a hot shower and a comfortable bed are luxuries that linger only in their memories.

It is a still, small voice and a throbbing heart that causes hundreds of thousands of young men and women to leave promising professions, put off their education (sometimes leaving athletic and other scholarships), or delay romances to serve the Lord at their own expense to declare the Restoration of the gospel.

Motivation to keep the commandments

It is a still, small voice and a throbbing heart that gives our young people the desire and courage to stand for purity, honesty, and principle, even at the expense of sometimes being ridiculed and rejected. It is a still, small voice and a throbbing heart that motivates one to joyfully keep God's commandments and share the burdens of those less fortunate. Yes, there is power in a still, small voice and a throbbing heart.

Alma had his way of asking about the spiritual condition of our hearts. He asks, "Have ye spiritually been born of God?" And then: "Have ye received his image in your countenances? *Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?*" (Alma 5:14; italics added). In other words, is your heart throbbing with a testimony of Jesus Christ?

Three things that make a heart throb*Knowledge that Jesus is the Savior*

May I tell you just three things of many that cause my heart to throb? First, my heart throbs with the knowledge that Jesus Christ is my personal Savior and that His love for me was sufficient that He would suffer unimaginable pain and even death. My heart throbs when, in the solitude of my deep thoughts, I realize I can be cleansed, purified, and redeemed through the blood of Jesus Christ. My heart throbs when I contemplate the price that was paid—the suffering incurred to spare me from similar personal suffering for my sins and transgressions.

Restoration through Joseph Smith

Second, my heart throbs with the knowledge that a young boy only 14 years of age went into a grove of trees—and from a simple, humble prayer the heavens

opened, God and Christ appeared, and angels descended. And thus the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ was restored with all of its priesthood, covenants, and purity of doctrine. My heart throbs when I consider what this boy prophet endured to bring about the fulness of the restored gospel. While heavenly angels were descending, Satan's angels were also at work. The persecutions began, and like the lives of prophets of old, Joseph's life culminated in his martyrdom. Throughout all his trials and persecutions, the young prophet remained steadfast and determined.

Because of the Prophet Joseph Smith, I understand more fully the magnitude of the Atonement. Because of the Prophet Joseph, I better understand the significance of the Garden of Gethsemane—a place of great suffering as Christ assumed our personal suffering not only for our sins but also for our pains, infirmities, trials, and tragedies. I understand the infinite and eternal nature of His great and last sacrifice. I better understand the love our Savior exemplified in His last redeeming act. Because of Joseph Smith, my love and gratitude for the Savior is magnified and my worship more meaningful. Among the many hymns in our hymnbook written by W. W. Phelps is the familiar song with the words "Praise to the man who communed with Jehovah!" ("Praise to the Man," *Hymns*, no. 27). My heart throbs as I sing that song.

Yes, because we sing with enthusiasm and gusto, "Praise to the man who communed with Jehovah!" we sing about the Savior with even more reverence, emotion, and gratitude with the words "Oh, it is wonderful that he should care for me / Enough to die for me! / Oh, it is wonderful, wonderful to me!" ("I Stand All Amazed," *Hymns*, no. 193). My heart throbs because of the enlightenment the Prophet Joseph brought to my life regarding the personal effect of the Atonement of my Savior.

Truths revealed in the Book of Mormon

Third, my heart throbs as I study and ponder the sacred scriptures in the Book of Mormon, as it complements the Bible and further testifies of the divinity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Redeemer and Savior of the world. Because of this sacred companion to the Bible, my understanding of Christ's doctrine is expanded; thus many of the questions left unanswered in the Bible are explained to my full satisfaction. The Book of Mormon is tangible evidence that Joseph is a prophet of God, Christ did in reality appear to him, and the gospel has been restored in its purity and its fulness.

My heart throbs just to contemplate the miracle of the Book of Mormon's existence—the laborious job of engraving on metal plates, the careful custodianship through the centuries by God's chosen, and the miraculous translation. Truly it fits the perfect definition of holy writ. Because of God's majestic love for us, He provided this evidence that we can handle, we can peruse, we can study, and we can even challenge. But, most important, God loves me enough that He will give me and anyone else who sincerely seeks a personal revelation of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon—the tangible evidence of the Restoration and that Joseph Smith was a true prophet.

Seek a testimony of sacred truths

In speaking of this sacred knowledge, the Book of Mormon prophet Alma testifies:

"Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself? Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety?

"Behold, I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many

days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation" (Alma 5:45–46).

Like Alma of old, each of us, members and sincere investigators alike, can know with surety that these things are true. It is our great privilege to know. It is more than a privilege; it is our responsibility to know. It is our enormous loss to not know when such a privilege is given. The Lord has said, "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7). The Book of Mormon

prophet Jacob says, "Come with full purpose of heart" (Jacob 6:5).

We do not need to rely upon intellect or our physical senses. We study, we pray, and, like Alma of old, we may even fast, and then comes a still, small voice and a throbbing heart. Imagine a personal revelation from God that these things are true. The very thought of it makes my heart throb. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir and congregation sang
"Come, Ye Children of the Lord."

Sister Coleen K. Menlove

All thy children shall be taught of the Lord

Recent disasters around the world have touched our hearts. The suffering children, who are innocent victims, weigh particularly heavy upon us. We have seen children without family members to provide, protect, and love them. Our hearts desire to reach out and help in some way—any way that would relieve their suffering and bring hope to their lives. We are grateful for the opportunities we have to give assistance. We are encouraged by the efforts of many who are helping these children.

However, we do not need to look far to find children who live in different yet challenging circumstances. Unknowingly, we may look beyond the children in our own midst. Are we really aware of the perilous circumstances surrounding our own children? We can usually determine if their physical needs are met, but what about their spiritual needs? Do they know of the light and peace of the gospel of Jesus Christ? The scriptures teach, "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children."¹

Children need the peace that comes from knowing they have a loving Heavenly Father, who sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to bring light and hope into the world. It is up to us as adults to direct children to that peace and light.

Helping children know what matters most

The spiritual plight of some children in the world today is depicted in a painting by the Danish artist Carl Bloch. This painting beautifully illustrates a scriptural account found in John, chapter 5. Christ, the healer and comforter, is the focus of the painting. He is lifting a covering from a man who has had infirmities since birth. The man is waiting for the miracle of healing in the pool of Bethesda, but he has no one to assist him. As the man waits, hoping for a miracle, Christ stands in his presence with the power to heal him.

The painting includes several figures in the background, none of whom are looking directly at Christ. The Lord is in their midst, yet only one man sees Him as such. All the others appear to be going about

their daily business, oblivious to the great power of Jesus and the miracle about to occur in their presence. A young child and a woman, perhaps his mother, are in view of Jesus; yet like the others, their eyes are focused elsewhere. In the very presence of the Savior, this woman fails to direct the child to the Savior.

I wonder, would we too have missed this opportunity to come unto Christ? Are life's experiences distracting us and dulling our spiritual view so we are not focusing on that which matters most? I wonder, do we miss opportunities to learn of the Lord and feel His love? Do we miss opportunities to share with others—especially children—that which matters most, the gospel of Jesus Christ? We have all seen children and youth standing in the crowds, confused and wanting to know what matters most.

I can almost hear this child and other children crying out the words so many of us have sung, "Teach me to walk in the light." Remember the words:

Teach me to walk in the light of his
love;
Teach me to pray to my Father above;
Teach me to know of the things that
are right;
Teach me, teach me to walk in the
light.²

Are we teaching our children to know, feel, and rejoice in the beauty, power, and miracles of the gospel of Jesus Christ? President Gordon B. Hinckley has counseled: "Let us nurture our children concerning Him whom we call the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us teach our children the grand saving principles of the gospel."³ Children need to know that having faith in the Savior and following Him will help them receive peace in this troubled world.

Follow Jesus's example in teaching children

How do we teach our children? We can follow the example of the Savior. In the Book of Mormon we read of the resur-

rected Savior's appearance to those in the Western Hemisphere. While teaching the people, He gathered the children to Him. He knelt and prayed with the children and for them. He blessed the children one by one. He felt the joy of their presence and opened the heavens that the children might be taught from on high.

As you include children at your family dinner table, as you involve them in daily family prayer and scripture study and in family home evening, you are following the example of the Savior by loving and teaching them. As you do this, let them know that together your family is striving to keep the commandments and to be worthy to be an eternal family. It may be during the informal one-on-one times that the Spirit will prompt us to ask just the right questions or to say just the right thing to help our children know and feel the light of the Lord. If we make the opportunities, the Spirit will guide us.

We have wonderful, capable children in our midst. We can help them find peace in this life and in the life to come.

Be filled with light to resist darkness

Children need to experience the Light of Christ so they can choose the light and resist the darkness. Moses had a miraculous experience when he was transfigured and beheld God with his spiritual eyes. After Moses had been taught of God and had beheld His glory and work, Satan came to Moses with darkness and confusion. Because Moses had experienced the light and glory of God, he knew the difference. He stood boldly against Satan saying, "Who art thou? For behold I am a son of God."⁴

Children need to be filled with the light of the gospel so when temptation comes they can say: "I know who I am. I am a child of God. I know what I am to do. I am to be baptized, receive the Holy Ghost, and keep the commandments." Then children can say: "I know who I can become. I can be-

come a righteous young woman,” or, “I can become a righteous young man and receive the priesthood of God.” Children filled with this knowledge and light can make the decision to reject darkness and turn to the light and peace of the gospel.

The gospel brings children peace

Children who have the gospel tucked into their hearts recognize the hand of the Lord in their lives. Children know more than we sometimes suppose and can do more than we sometimes think. I have learned that children who have the light of the gospel are believing. They do not doubt. Samantha, age 11, said, “I know the gospel is true because I can feel it.” Three-year-old Benjamin said, “I know Heavenly Father hears and answers my prayers because He loves me.” Children who have the light of the gospel say, “I know the Holy Ghost is directing my life because I feel happy when I choose to follow its promptings.”

Sam is beginning to understand the feelings that come from the Holy Ghost. When his mother asked, “Who is the Holy Ghost?” he said, “It is a warm feeling inside me.” Sam also understood that when his little two-week-old brother was sick, it was the Holy Ghost encouraging him to pray for the Lord’s help.

Can you feel the peace of these children?

“Teach me to walk in the light”

Teaching children requires more than desire. It requires diligence on our part. Earlier I mentioned the song “Teach Me to Walk in the Light,” written by Clara McMaster. Sister McMaster shared with me that while serving on the Primary general board, she received the assignment to write a song about teaching children. She found this an especially daunting task and prayed to know how to begin and complete this assignment.

After much effort she submitted her work, only to be told that it was not yet right. She was not told what to change, only to continue the effort until it was right. She was spiritually exhausted, not knowing how to proceed. She again sought guidance from the Lord, made changes, and submitted another edition. This process continued three times until at last she was told it was perfect and she was not to change anything.

Even though there were many times that Sister McMaster wanted to give up, she diligently worked at what she had been asked to do and what she hoped would bless the lives of children. Her inspired music has been sung by adults and children in many lands and in many languages. This song represents the desire of my heart—that all children will learn to walk in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This song begins with a plea from a child, “Teach me to walk in the light,” and ends with a commitment, “Gladly, gladly we’ll walk in the light.”⁵

It will take time and effort to teach children, but we must not become distracted or give up. Our children so need the fulfillment of the promise “and great shall be the peace of thy children.”⁶ Let no child wonder if he or she is loved by Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. Let all children know who they are, what they are to do, and who they can become.

I am grateful to all who reach out to children, who love them and teach them that regardless of their earthly circumstances, they can feel peace in the light of the gospel and receive the promises of the Lord.

A message to the children

I would like to speak especially to the children around the world. I have met some of you here and some of you in places such as Africa, the Philippines, Korea, and most recently in Ukraine and Russia. I have visited you in Primaries and even in

children's hospitals. I hope you know how much you are loved by your family, your Primary teachers, and, most importantly, Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.

Never settle for less than the privileges and blessings God offers you. The standards you keep in your dress, your language, and your behavior are outward signs of your inward commitment to follow Heavenly Father's plan for you.

Your influence upon me is greater than you can imagine. Thank you for the joy and hope you bring into my heart and the hearts of your Primary leaders and especially your parents. Please remember to express your thanks to those who love and teach you. I know, and I want you to

know, you are a child of God, Heavenly Father loves you, and you can pray to Him anytime, anywhere. Try always to remember and follow Jesus Christ, and this will bring light and peace into your lives now and give you hope for the eternities. Of this I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. 3 Nephi 22:13.
2. "Teach Me to Walk in the Light," *Children's Songbook*, 177.
3. "Messages of Inspiration from President Hinckley," *Church News*, Sept. 4, 1999, 2.
4. Moses 1:13.
5. *Children's Songbook*, 177.
6. 3 Nephi 22:13.

Elder Russell M. Nelson

Reflections on Sister Nelson's passing

My dear brethren and sisters, since our last general conference, my sweetheart—my beloved wife for 59 years—passed away. While I was at home on a rare Saturday with no assignment, we had worked together. She had washed our clothing. I had helped to carry it, fold it, and put it in place. Then while we were sitting on the sofa, holding hands, enjoying a program on television, my precious Dantzel slipped peacefully into eternity. Her passing came suddenly and unexpectedly. Just four days earlier, our doctor's report at a routine checkup indicated that her laboratory tests were good. After my efforts to revive her proved fruitless, feelings of shock and sorrow overwhelmed me. My closest friend, angel mother of our 10 children, grandmother of our 56 grandchildren, had been taken from us.

Dantzel was not only a loved and loving companion. She was a teacher: by her noble example, she taught faith, virtue, obedience, and mercy. She taught me how

to listen and to love. Because of her, I know all the blessings that can come to a husband, father, and grandfather.

With deep gratitude I acknowledge the tremendous outpouring of love from dear friends across the world. Countless letters, calls, cards, and other messages have been sent. All tributes expressed loving admiration for her and sympathy for us whom she left behind. Those messages came in such large numbers that we, regretfully, were unable to respond to all of them individually. May I thank each and all for your great kindness toward us. Thank you so very, very much. Your expressions have brought much comfort through this time of heartache for our family. We really love dear Dantzel! We miss her!

From her sudden departure we can learn a very important lesson: now is the time to prepare to meet God. Tomorrow may be too late. Prophets through the ages have so declared: "This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God. . . . Do not procrastinate the day of your repentance."¹

The need to prepare now

Yet many do procrastinate.² A prophet warns us: “Ye cannot say . . . that I *will* repent, that I *will* return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will . . . possess your body in that eternal world.”³ Another prophet adds, “He that is filthy shall be filthy still; and he that is righteous shall be righteous still.”⁴

Great is the knowledge that “whatever principle of intelligence we attain . . . in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection.”⁵ From the Prophet Joseph Smith we also learn that “God has . . . a time . . . appointed . . . when He will bring all His subjects, who have obeyed His voice and kept His commandments, into His celestial rest. This rest⁶ is of such perfection and glory, that man has need of a preparation before he can, according to the laws of that kingdom, enter it and enjoy its blessings. . . . God has given certain laws to the human family, which, if observed, are sufficient to prepare them to inherit this rest.”⁷ Sister Nelson was so prepared!

Remain faithful during trials

That glorious goal seems mighty distant if one is discouraged by worldly trouble and gloom. I remember when a friend having a difficult day exclaimed, “Oh, why was I ever born?” God’s plan answers his question. We came into this life to acquire a physical body. We may fall in love and be married. We may have children and experience the trials of mortal life. (Please forgive me for mentioning children and the trials of life in the same breath. I sense that they are both part of our growing process.) The Church was restored—the earth was created—so that those families could be sealed in holy temples. Otherwise, the whole earth would be “utterly wasted.”⁸

We came to be tried, to be tested, and to choose.⁹ Our decisions determine our

destiny. We are “free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator . . . , or to choose captivity and death.”¹⁰ Those who choose the Lord’s way will likely endure persecution.¹¹ But their reward is certain. Those who prove faithful “shall inherit the kingdom of God, . . . and their joy shall be full forever.”¹² Sister Nelson has earned that reward. What comfort that brings to me and our family!

Maintain an eternal perspective

Trials and tests apply to rich and poor alike. Years ago I was asked to perform an operation upon a very wealthy man. A surgical biopsy confirmed that he had an advanced cancer that had spread throughout his body. As I reported this news, his immediate response was to rely upon his wealth. He would go anywhere or do anything to treat his condition. He thought he could buy his way back to health. But he soon passed away. Someone asked, “How much wealth did he leave?” The answer, of course, was, “All of it!”

His priorities were set upon things of the world. His ladder of success had been leaning against the wrong wall. I think of him when I read this scripture: “Behold, your days of probation are past; ye have procrastinated the day of your salvation until it is . . . too late.”¹³

In radiant contrast, Sister Nelson prepared throughout her life for the time when she would return to God. She lived each day as though it were her last. She cherished every hour, knowing that time on earth is precious.

Some people live as if there were no day of reckoning. Others waste today’s time with a disabling fear of tomorrow or a paralyzing preoccupation over mistakes of yesterday. Each of us might well heed the words of a poet, as posted on a sundial:

The shadow by my finger cast
Divides the future from the past:
Before it, sleeps the unborn hour,

In darkness, and beyond thy power:
Behind its unreturning line,
The vanished hour, no longer thine:
One hour alone is in thy hands,—
The NOW on which the shadow
stands.¹⁴

How do we prepare?

Now is the time. But *how* do we prepare? Begin with repentance! Scripture declares, “If ye have sought to do wickedly in the days of your probation, then ye are found unclean before the judgment-seat of God; . . . no unclean thing can dwell with God.”¹⁵ He gave this simple rule: “Except ye abide my law ye cannot attain to this glory.”¹⁶

Respect for the physical body

Now is the time to show reverent respect for one’s physical body. It serves as the tabernacle for one’s spirit throughout all eternity. Physical appetites are to be controlled by the will of one’s spirit. We are to “deny [our]selves of all ungodliness.”¹⁷ We are to “forsake all evil and cleave unto all good, [and] live by every word which proceedeth forth out of the mouth of God.”¹⁸

Obedience to God’s laws

Because of frequent and frightening calamities in the world, some people doubt the existence of God. But, in fact, He is trying to help us. He revealed these words: “How oft have I called upon you by the mouth of my servants, and by the ministering of angels, and by mine own voice, and by the voice of thunderings, and . . . tempests, . . . earthquakes, . . . great hailstorms, . . . famines and pestilences of every kind, . . . and would have saved you with an everlasting salvation, but ye would not!”¹⁹

His hope for us is eternal life. We qualify for it by obedience to covenants and ordinances of the temple—for ourselves, our families, and our ancestors. We cannot be made perfect without them.²⁰ We cannot

wish our way into the presence of God. We are to obey the laws upon which those blessings are predicated.²¹

Align goals with God’s goals

God’s plan is fair. Even those “who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God.”²² His plan is also merciful. He “will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts.”²³

Now is the time to enroll our names among the people of God. This we do by paying tithing. He tithes His people to bless them.²⁴ Sister Nelson taught that lesson to our family over and over again.²⁵

Now is the time to align our goals with God’s goals. His work and His glory—“to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man”²⁶—can become ours. Of temple marriage the Savior declared, “If a man marry a wife by my word, which is my law, and by the new and everlasting covenant, . . . [they] shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, . . . exaltation and glory in all things.”²⁷ We are to emulate the example of the Lord, to love as He did, to pray as He did, and to endure to the end as He did.²⁸

Importance of death in God’s eternal plan

Death is a necessary component of our eternal existence. No one knows when it will come, but it is essential to God’s great plan of happiness.²⁹ Thanks to the Atonement of the Lord, eventual resurrection is a reality and eternal life is a possibility for all humankind.³⁰ That possibility becomes a reality as we obey God’s law. He said, “Except ye shall keep my commandments, . . . ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”³¹ One day we will be judged by the Lord³² and go to our own mansion prepared in our Father’s heavenly house.³³ Celestial glory awaits those who

have been faithful to God's gentle commands.³⁴

Brothers and sisters, we live to die and we die to live—in another realm. If we are well prepared, death brings no terror. From an eternal perspective, death is premature only for those who are not prepared to meet God.

Now is the time to prepare. Then, when death comes, we can move toward the celestial glory that Heavenly Father has prepared for His faithful children. Meanwhile, for sorrowing loved ones left behind—such as our family and me—the sting of death is soothed by a steadfast faith in Christ, a perfect brightness of hope, a love of God and of all men, and a deep desire to serve them.³⁵ That faith, that hope, that love will qualify us to come into God's holy presence and, with our eternal companions and families, dwell with Him forever. Of this I testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Alma 34:32–33; see also Alma 13:27.
2. Scripture admonishes each of us to “harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation; . . . therefore, if ye will repent . . . , immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you” (Alma 34:31).
3. Alma 34:34; italics added.
4. Mormon 9:14; see also 2 Nephi 9:15–16; Doctrine and Covenants 88:27–32, 34–35; 130:2.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 130:18.
6. In the New Testament, the term *rest* has been translated from the Greek feminine noun *katapausis*, which means “the heavenly blessedness in which God dwells.” Thus, *rest* connotes an element of glory.
7. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 54.
8. See Doctrine and Covenants 2:1–3; 138:48; Joseph Smith—History 1:39.
9. See 2 Nephi 9:27; Doctrine and Covenants 98:12; Abraham 3:24–26.
10. 2 Nephi 2:27.
11. See 2 Timothy 3:12.
12. 2 Nephi 9:18.
13. Helaman 13:38.
14. Henry Van Dyke, “The Sun-Dial at Wells College,” in *The Poems of Henry Van Dyke* (1911), 345. Sundial and poem displayed at Wells College, Aurora, New York.
15. 1 Nephi 10:21.
16. Doctrine and Covenants 132:21; see also Doctrine and Covenants 88:36–39.
17. Moroni 10:32; see also 2 Nephi 2:21; Mormon 9:28.
18. Doctrine and Covenants 98:11.
19. Doctrine and Covenants 43:25.
20. See Doctrine and Covenants 128:15, 18.
21. See Doctrine and Covenants 130:20–21.
22. Doctrine and Covenants 137:7.
23. Doctrine and Covenants 137:9.
24. See Malachi 3:10; 3 Nephi 24:10. Tithing also prepares people against a future day of vengeance and burning (see Doctrine and Covenants 85:3).
25. See Spencer J. Condie, *Russell M. Nelson: Father, Surgeon, Apostle* (2003), 104.
26. Moses 1:39; see also Moses 6:59; Joseph Smith Translation, Genesis 6:62.
27. Doctrine and Covenants 132:19; see also Doctrine and Covenants 75:5; 101:65.
28. See 2 Nephi 33:4; 3 Nephi 15:9; 27:21–22; Doctrine and Covenants 14:7.
29. See Alma 42:8–9.
30. See 1 Corinthians 15:50–54; 1 John 5:11, 20; Alma 12:25; Mormon 9:13; Doctrine and Covenants 46:14; 76:40–42, 50–59; 133:62.
31. 3 Nephi 12:20.
32. See 1 Nephi 10:20; 2 Nephi 9:41–46; Alma 12:27.
33. See John 14:2; Doctrine and Covenants 98:18.
34. See Doctrine and Covenants 78:7; 131:1–3.
35. See 2 Nephi 31:20; Mosiah 16:7–8; Moroni 7:38–48.

The choir sang “Teach Me to Walk in the Light.”

President Faust

We are grateful to the Tabernacle Choir for the beautiful music they have provided this morning. President Thomas S. Monson, First Counselor in the First Presidency, will be our concluding speaker at this session.

Following President Monson's remarks, the choir will sing "How Firm a Foundation." After the singing, the benediction will be offered by Elder Robert K. Dellenbach of the Seventy, and the conference will be adjourned until 2:00 this afternoon.

President Thomas S. Monson

Constant truths for changing times

My dear brothers and sisters, both within my view and assembled throughout the world, I seek an interest in your prayers and your faith as I respond to the assignment and privilege to speak to you.

I begin by expressing commendation to all of you. In this challenging world, the youth of the Church are the very best ever. The faith, the service, and the actions of our members are praiseworthy. We are a prayerful and faith-filled people, ever striving to be decent and honest. We take care of each other. We try to show love to our neighbors.

However, lest we become complacent, may I quote from 2 Nephi in the Book of Mormon:

"At that day shall [the devil] . . . lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls."¹

Someone has said that our complacency tree has many branches, and each spring more buds come into bloom.

We cannot afford to be complacent. We live in perilous times; the signs are all around us. We are acutely aware of the negative influences in our society that stalk traditional families. At times television and movies portray worldly and immoral heroes and heroines and attempt to hold up as role models some actors and actresses whose lives are anything but exemplary.

Why should we follow a blind guide? Radios blare forth much denigrating music with blatant lyrics, dangerous invitations, and descriptions of almost every type of evil imaginable.

We, as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, must stand up to the dangers which surround us and our families. To aid us in this determination, I offer several suggestions, as well as some examples from my own life.

Hold regular family home evenings

I begin with family home evening. We cannot afford to neglect this heaven-inspired program. It can bring spiritual growth to each member of the family, helping him or her to withstand the temptations which are everywhere. The lessons learned in the home are those that last the longest. As President Gordon B. Hinckley and his predecessors have stated, "The home is the basis of a righteous life, and no other instrumentality can take its place or fulfill its essential functions."²

Dr. Glenn J. Doman, noted author and medical authority, wrote:

"The newborn child is almost an exact duplicate of an empty . . . computer, although superior to such a computer in almost every way. . . . What is placed in the child's [mind] during the first eight years of life is probably there to stay." "If you put misinformation into his [mind] during [this period], it is extremely difficult to erase it."

Dr. Doman added that the most receptive age in human life is that of two or three years.³

I like this thought: “Your mind is a cupboard, and you stock the shelves.” Let us make certain that our cupboard shelves, and those of our family members, are stocked with the things which will provide safety to our souls and enable us to return to our Father in Heaven. Such shelves could well be stocked with gospel scholarship, faith, prayer, love, service, obedience, example, and kindness.

Avoid debt and live within your means

Next, I address the subject of debt. This is a day of borrowing, a day when multiple credit card offers arrive in our mailboxes each week. They generally offer a very low rate of interest which may apply for a short period of time; but what one usually doesn’t realize is that after that period has expired, the rates increase dramatically. I share with you a statement made by President J. Reuben Clark Jr., who many years ago was a member of the First Presidency. Its truth is timeless. Said he:

“It is a rule of our financial and economic life in all the world that interest is to be paid on borrowed money. . . .

“Interest never sleeps nor sickens nor dies; it never goes to the hospital; it works on Sundays and holidays; it never takes a vacation; it never visits nor travels; it takes no pleasure; it is never laid off work nor discharged from employment; it never works on reduced hours. . . . Once in debt, interest is your companion every minute of the day and night; you cannot shun it or slip away from it; you cannot dismiss it; it yields neither to entreaties, demands, or orders; and whenever you get in its way or cross its course or fail to meet its demands, it crushes you.”⁴

My brothers and sisters, I’m appalled at some of the advertising I see and hear advocating home equity loans. Simply put, they are second mortgages on homes. The

promotion for such loans is designed to tempt us to borrow more in order to have more. What is never mentioned is the fact that, should one be unable to make this “second” house payment, one is in danger of losing his house.

Avoid the philosophy and excuse that yesterday’s luxuries have become today’s necessities. They aren’t necessities unless we ourselves make them such. Many of our young couples today want to begin with multiple cars and the type of home Mother and Dad worked a lifetime to obtain. Consequently, they enter into long-term debt on the basis of two salaries. Perhaps too late they find that changes do come—women have children, sickness stalks some families, jobs are lost, natural disasters and other situations occur—and no longer can the mortgage payment, based on the income from two salaries, be made.

It is essential for us to live within our means.

Counsel to mothers

Next, I have felt impressed to speak to mothers, to fathers, to sons, and to daughters.

I would say to each mother, each father—be a good listener. Communication is so vital today in our fast-paced world. Take time to listen. And to you children, talk to your mother and to your father. It may be difficult to realize, but your parents have lived through many of the same challenges which you face today. Often they see the big picture more clearly than you can. They pray for you each day and are entitled to the inspiration of our Heavenly Father in providing you counsel and advice.

Mothers, share household duties. It is often easier to do everything yourself than to persuade your children to help, but it is so essential for them to learn the importance of doing their share.

Counsel to fathers

Fathers, I would counsel you to demonstrate love and kindness to your wife. Be patient with your children. Don't indulge them to excess, for they must learn to make their own way in the world.

I would encourage you to be available to your children. I have heard it said that no man, as death approaches, has ever declared that he wished he had spent more time at the office.

I love the following example, taken from an article entitled "A Day at the Beach" by Arthur Gordon. Said he:

"When I was around thirteen and my brother ten, Father had promised to take us to the circus. But at lunchtime there was a phone call; some urgent business required his attention downtown. We braced ourselves for disappointment. Then we heard him say, 'No, I won't be down. It'll have to wait.'

"When he came back to the table, Mother smiled [and said,] 'The circus keeps coming back, you know.'

" 'I know,' said Father. 'But childhood doesn't.' " ⁵

My brothers and sisters, time with your children is fleeting. Do not put off being with them now. Someone put it another way: Live only for tomorrow, and you will have a lot of empty yesterdays today. ⁶

Counsel to parents

Parents, help your children set goals concerning school and careers. Help your sons learn manners and respect for women and children.

Said President Hinckley: "As we train a new generation, so will the world be in a few years. If you are worried about the future, then look to the upbringing of your children." ⁷

The Apostle Paul's statement to his beloved Timothy could well apply: "Be thou an example of the believers, in word,

in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." ⁸

Parents, live your lives in such a way that your children will find you an example worthy of emulation.

Search out your heritage; do temple work

I admonish all families: search out your heritage. It is important to know, as far as possible, those who came before us. We discover something about ourselves when we learn about our ancestors.

I recall as a boy hearing of the experiences of my Miller ancestors. In the spring of 1848, my great-great-grandparents Charles Stewart Miller and Mary McGowan Miller, joined the Church in their native Scotland; left their home in Rutherglen, Scotland; and journeyed across the Atlantic Ocean. They reached the port of New Orleans and traveled up the Mississippi River to St. Louis, Missouri, with a group of Saints, arriving there in 1849. One of their 11 children, Margaret, would become my great-grandmother.

When the family arrived in St. Louis, planning to earn enough money to make their way to the Salt Lake Valley, a plague of cholera struck the area. The Miller family was hard-hit: in the space of two weeks, mother, father, and two of their sons died. My great-grandmother Margaret Miller was 13 years old at the time.

Because of all the deaths in the area, there were no caskets available—at any price. The older surviving boys dismantled the family's oxen pens in order to make crude caskets for the family members who had passed away.

The nine remaining orphaned Miller children and the husband of one of the older daughters left St. Louis in the spring of 1850 with four oxen and one wagon, arriving finally in the Salt Lake Valley that same year.

I owe such a debt of gratitude to these and other noble forebears who loved the gospel and who loved the Lord so deeply

that they were willing to sacrifice all they had, including their own lives, for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. How grateful I am for the temple ordinances which bind us together for all eternity.

I emphasize how essential is the work we do in the temples of the Lord for our kindred dead.

Just two months ago today, members of my family gathered together in the Salt Lake Temple to perform sealings for some of our deceased ancestors. This was one of the most spiritual experiences our family has had together and enhanced the love we have for one another and the obligation which is ours to live worthy of our heritage.

A son watches his father's example

Years ago when our youngest son, Clark, was attending a religion class at Brigham Young University, the instructor, during a lecture, asked him, "Clark, what is an example of life with your father that you best remember?"

The instructor later wrote to me and told me of the reply which Clark had given to the class. Said Clark:

"When I was a deacon in the Aaronic Priesthood, my father and I went pheasant hunting near Malad, Idaho. The day was Monday—the last day of the pheasant hunting season. We walked through numerous fields in search of pheasants but saw only a few, and those we missed. Dad then said to me, 'Clark,' he looked at his watch, 'let's unload our guns, and we'll place them in this ditch. Then we'll kneel down to pray.' I thought Dad would pray for more pheasants, but I was wrong. He explained to me that Elder Richard L. Evans of the Quorum of the Twelve was gravely ill and that at 12:00 noon on that particular Monday the members of the Quorum of the Twelve—wherever they may be—were to kneel and, in a way, together unite in a fervent prayer of faith for

Elder Evans. Removing our caps, we knelt, we prayed."

I well remember the occasion, but I never dreamed a son was watching, was learning, was building his own testimony.

Tragedy follows criticism of a paperboy

Several years ago we had a young paperboy who didn't always deliver the paper in the manner intended. Instead of getting the paper on the porch, he sometimes accidentally threw it into the bushes or even close to the street. Some on his paper route decided to start a petition of complaint. One day a delegation came to our home and asked my wife, Frances, to sign the petition. She declined, saying, "Why, he's just a little boy, and the papers are so heavy for him. I would never be critical of him, for he tries his best." The petition, however, was signed by many of the others on the paper route and sent to the boy's supervisors.

Not many days afterward, I came home from work and found Frances in tears. When she was finally able to talk, she told me that she had just learned that the body of the little paperboy had been found in his garage, where he had taken his own life. Apparently the criticism heaped upon him had been too much for him to bear. How grateful we were that we had not joined in that criticism. What a vivid lesson this has always been regarding the importance of being nonjudgmental and treating everyone with kindness.

Follow the Savior's example

The Savior should be our example. As is recorded of Him, He "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."⁹ He "went about doing good, . . . for God was with him."¹⁰

Remember that oftentimes the wisdom of God appears as foolishness to men, but the greatest single lesson we can learn in

mortality is that when God speaks and a man obeys, that man will always be right.

May we ever follow the Prince of Peace, who literally showed the way for us to follow, for by doing so, we will survive these turbulent times. His divine plan can save us from the dangers which surround us on every side. His example points the way. When faced with temptation, He shunned it. When offered the world, He declined it. When asked for His life, He gave it.

Now is the time. This is the place. May we follow Him, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. 2 Nephi 28:20–21.

2. First Presidency letter, Feb. 11, 1999; see *Ensign*, June 1999, 80.
3. *How to Teach Your Baby to Read* (1964), 43, 45, 44.
4. In Conference Report, Apr. 1938, 102–3.
5. In *A Touch of Wonder* (1974), 77–78.
6. See Meredith Willson and Franklin Lacey, *The Music Man* (1957).
7. “Behold Your Little Ones,” *Ensign*, June 2001, 2.
8. 1 Timothy 4:12.
9. Luke 2:52.
10. Acts 10:38.

The choir sang “How Firm a Foundation.”

Elder Robert K. Dellenbach offered the benediction.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The second session of the 175th Annual General Conference convened in the Conference Center at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, April 2, 2005. President Thomas S. Monson conducted this session.

A combined choir from the Ogden and Logan Utah Institutes provided the music. Jonathan G. Woodstock, Jerald F. Simon, and Brent T. Cottle directed the choir, and Bonnie Goodliffe was the organist.

President Gordon B. Hinckley read the following statement as the meeting began.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Brothers and sisters, as we open this meeting, I offer the following statement:

We join those throughout the world who mourn the passing of Pope John Paul II, an extraordinary man of faith, vision, and intellect, whose courageous actions have touched the world in ways that will be felt for generations to come. The Pope’s voice remained firm in defense of free-

dom, family, and Christianity. On matters of principle and morality he was uncompromising. On his compassion for the world’s poor he has been unwavering. He will be greatly missed. Thank you.

President Thomas S. Monson

We welcome you this afternoon to this, the second general session of the 175th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Monson, conduct this session.

We extend our greetings to all who are in attendance or who are participating by means of television, radio, or the Internet, and to the many who are watching in stake centers in various parts of the world where the conference is being carried by satellite transmission.

The music for this session will be by a combined choir from the Ogden and Logan Utah Institutes, under the direction of Jonathan G. Woodstock, Jerald F. Simon,

and Brent T. Cottle, with Bonnie Goodliffe at the organ.

The choir will open these services by singing “I Need Thee Every Hour.” The invocation will then be offered by Elder John M. Madsen of the Seventy.

The choir sang “I Need Thee Every Hour.”

Elder John M. Madsen offered the invocation.

President Monson

The choir will now sing “As I Search the Holy Scriptures.” Following the sing-

ing, the General Authorities, Area Seventies, and general auxiliary presidencies of the Church will be presented for sustaining vote.

Brother Robert W. Cantwell, managing director of the Auditing Department, will then read the Church Auditing Department Report. He will be followed by Brother F. Michael Watson, secretary to the First Presidency, who will present the Statistical Report of the Church for the year 2004.

The choir sang “As I Search the Holy Scriptures.”

The Sustaining of Church Officers

President Thomas S. Monson

My brothers and sisters, President Hinckley has requested that I now present to you the General Authorities, Area Seventies, and general auxiliary presidencies of the Church for your sustaining vote.

It is proposed that we sustain Gordon Bitner Hinckley as prophet, seer, and revelator and President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Thomas Spencer Monson as First Counselor in the First Presidency; and James Esdras Faust as Second Counselor in the First Presidency. Those in favor may manifest it. Those opposed, if any, may manifest it.

It is proposed that we sustain Thomas Spencer Monson as President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; Boyd Kenneth Packer as Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; and the following as members of that quorum: Boyd K. Packer, L. Tom Perry, Russell M. Nelson, Dallin H. Oaks, M. Russell Ballard, Joseph B. Wirthlin, Richard G. Scott, Robert D. Hales, Jeffrey R. Holland,

Henry B. Eyring, Dieter F. Uchtdorf, and David A. Bednar. Those in favor, please manifest it. Any opposed.

It is proposed that we sustain the counselors in the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles as prophets, seers, and revelators. All in favor, please manifest it. Contrary, if there be any, by the same sign.

It is proposed that we release the following as Area Seventies effective May 1, 2005:

Jorge O. Abad, Carlos E. Agüero, Marcos A. Aidukaitis, Gustavo A. Barrios, René J. Cabrera, Edison M. Cabrito, Tad R. Callister, Carl B. Cook, Reynaldo L. Cuyong, Jorge L. del Castillo, Benjamin De Hoyos, Lindsay T. Dil, Fred C. Dimaya, Enrique R. Falabella, Roberto Garcia, Larry W. Gibbons, C. Scott Grow, John A. Harris, Merrill F. Higham, R. Randall Huff, Michael L. Jensen, Paul V. Johnson, Won Yong Ko, Wilfredo R. López, Ronald L. Loveland, Jeffrey J. Marchant, Hans H. Mattsson, E. Israel Pérez, Holger D. Rakow, Alfonso Ramos, Carlos C. Revillo Sr., Manfred H. Schütze, J. Mitchel Scott,

José A. Teixeira da Silva, Lowell M. Snow, Guillermo Torres, Roland N. Walker. All who wish to join us in expressing appreciation for the service of these brethren, please manifest it.

It is proposed that we release with a vote of thanks and sincere appreciation as the Primary general presidency Sisters Coleen K. Menlove, Sydney S. Reynolds, and Gayle M. Clegg. All who can join in a vote of appreciation, please manifest it.

It is proposed that we sustain Elder Marlin K. Jensen as Church Historian/Recorder. All in favor, please manifest it. Any opposed by the same sign.

It is proposed that we sustain Benjamin De Hoyos, David F. Evans, C. Scott Grow, Richard G. Hinckley, Paul V. Johnson, Paul E. Koelliker, Paul B. Pieper, and Ulisses Soares as new members of the First Quorum of the Seventy and Won Yong Ko, Wolfgang H. Paul, Lowell M. Snow, and Paul K. Sybrowsky as new members of the Second Quorum of the Seventy. All in favor, please manifest it. Any opposed by the same sign.

It is proposed that we sustain the following as Area Seventies:

Nelson L. Altamirano, Manuel Araiz, Sergio E. Avila, Marcelo P. Bolfarini, Shayne M. Bowen, David R. Brown, Fernando E. Calderon, Milton da Rocha Camargo, Daniel M. Cañoles, I. Poloski Cordón, Federico F. Costales Jr., John C.

Dalton, Heber O. Diaz, Luis G. Duarte, Frerich Görts, Ronald J. Hammond, Miguel Hidalgo, Patrick Kearon, Donald J. Keyes, Christiaan H. Kleijweg, Larry R. Lawrence, Robert W. Lees, F. Rene Loli, Glendon Lyons, Juan A. Machuca, Raymundo Morales, Brent H. Nielson, Carlos S. Obata, Alejandro M. Robles, Gerardo L. Rubio, Gvido Senkans, Fabian L. Sinamban, Dirk Smibert, Hans T. Sorensen, Eivind Sterri, Miguel R. Valdez, Gary W. Walker, Richard C. Zambrano. All in favor, please manifest it. Any opposed by the same sign.

It is proposed that we sustain Cheryl Clark Lant as general president of the Primary, with Margaret Swensen Lifferth as first counselor and Vicki Fujii Matsumori as second counselor. All in favor, please manifest it. Opposed, if any, by the same sign.

It is proposed that we sustain the other General Authorities, Area Seventies, and general auxiliary presidencies as presently constituted. Those in favor, please manifest it. Opposed, if any.

It appears that the sustaining has been unanimous in the affirmative. Thank you, brothers and sisters, for your continued faith and prayers.

We shall now ask the newly called General Authorities and the Primary general presidency to take their places on the stand.

Church Auditing Department Report for 2004

Robert W. Cantwell

To the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Dear Brethren: The Auditing Department of the Church is independent of all other Church departments and operations and has been granted access to all records and systems necessary to evaluate the adequacy of controls over receipts and expen-

ditures of funds and the safeguarding of Church assets. The auditing staff consists of certified public accountants, certified internal auditors, certified information systems auditors, and other credentialed professionals.

As prescribed by revelation in section 120 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Council on the Disposition of the Tithes authorizes the expenditure of Church

funds. This council is composed of the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and the Presiding Bishopric. After receiving authorization to expend Church funds, Church departments administer approved budgets and expend funds in accordance with Church policies and procedures.

Based upon audits performed, the Church Auditing Department is of the opinion that, in all material respects, con-

tributions received, expenditures made, and assets of the Church for the year 2004 have been administered and recorded in accordance with appropriate accounting practices, approved budgets, and Church policies and procedures.

Respectfully submitted,
Church Auditing Department
Robert W. Cantwell
Managing Director

Church Statistical Report for 2004

F. Michael Watson

Brothers and sisters, the First Presidency has issued the following report concerning the growth and status of the Church as of December 31, 2004:

Number of Church units

Stakes	2,665
Missions	338
Districts	646
Wards and branches	26,670

Church membership

Total membership	12,275,822
Increase in children of record during 2004	98,870
Converts baptized during 2004 ..	241,239

Missionaries

Full-time missionaries	51,067
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Temples

Temples dedicated during 2004	3
(Accra Ghana, Copenhagen Denmark, and Manhattan New York)	
Temples rededicated during 2004	2
(Anchorage Alaska and São Paulo Brazil)	
Temples in operation	119

Prominent members who have passed away since last April

Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; *Elder David B. Haight* of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; *Sister Marjorie Pay Hinckley*, wife of President Gordon B. Hinckley, President of the Church; *Sister Ruby Olson Haight*, widow of Elder David B. Haight; *Sister Dantzel White Nelson*, wife of Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; *Sister Sarah Melissa Broadbent Paulsen Sorensen*, former counselor in the Primary general presidency and wife of Elder Lynn A. Sorensen, former member of the Seventy; *Sister Naomi Maxfield Shumway*, former Primary general president; *Sister Olive Eileen Robinson Dunyon Christensen*, former counselor in the Primary general presidency; *Sister Joan Blackhurst Spencer*, former Relief Society general secretary.

President Monson

Thank you, brethren. We will now be pleased to hear from Elders Joseph B. Wirthlin and Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin

The lasting effects of an unkind word

Many years ago, when I was called as a bishop, I had a desire for the bishopric to visit those who were less active in the Church and see if there was anything we could do to bring the blessings of the gospel into their lives.

One day we visited a man in his 50s who was a respected mechanic. He told me the last time he had been to church was when he was a young boy. Something had happened that day. He had been acting up in class and was being noisier than he should when his teacher became angry, pulled him out of class, and told him not to come back.

He never did.

It was remarkable to me that an unkind word spoken more than four decades earlier could have had such a profound effect. But it had. And, as a consequence, this man had never returned to church. Neither had his wife or children.

I apologized to him and expressed my sorrow that he had been treated that way. I told him how unfortunate it was that one word spoken in haste, and so long ago, could have the effect of excluding his family from the blessings that come from Church activity.

"After 40 years," I told him, "it's time the Church made things right."

I did my best to do so. I reassured him that he was welcome and needed. I rejoiced when this man and his family eventually returned to church and became strong and faithful members. In particular, this good brother became an effective home teacher because he understood how something as small as an unkind word could have consequences that extend throughout a lifetime and perhaps beyond.

The virtue of kindness

Kindness is the essence of greatness and the fundamental characteristic of the

noblest men and women I have known. Kindness is a passport that opens doors and fashions friends. It softens hearts and molds relationships that can last lifetimes.

Kind words not only lift our spirits in the moment they are given, but they can linger with us over the years. One day, when I was in college, a man seven years my senior congratulated me on my performance in a football game. He not only praised how well I had done in the game, but he had noticed that I had showed good sportsmanship. Even though this conversation happened more than 60 years ago, and even though it's highly unlikely the person who complimented me has any recollection of this conversation, I still remember the kind words spoken to me that day by Gordon B. Hinckley, who would later become President of the Church.

The attributes of thoughtfulness and kindness are inseparably linked with President Hinckley. When my father passed away in 1963, President Hinckley was the first person to come to our home. I'll never forget his kindness. He gave my mother a blessing and, among other things, promised her that she had much to look forward to and that life would be sweet for her. These words have brought comfort to her and to me, and I'll never forget his kindness.

Kindness is the essence of a celestial life. Kindness is how a Christlike person treats others. Kindness should permeate all of our words and actions at work, at school, at church, and especially in our homes.

The kindness of Jesus Christ

Jesus, our Savior, was the epitome of kindness and compassion. He healed the sick. He spent much of His time ministering to the one or many. He spoke compassionately to the Samaritan woman who was looked down upon by many. He instructed His disciples to allow the little

children to come unto Him. He was kind to all who had sinned, condemning only the sin, not the sinner. He kindly allowed thousands of Nephites to come forward and feel the nail prints in His hands and feet. Yet His greatest act of kindness was found in His atoning sacrifice, thus freeing all from the effects of death, and all from the effects of sin on conditions of repentance.

The kindness of Joseph Smith

The Prophet Joseph Smith exemplified kindness in his life to everyone, old and young. One child who benefited from the Prophet's kindness remembered:

"My older brother and I were going to school, near to the building which was known as Joseph's brick store. It had been raining the previous day, causing the ground to be very muddy, especially along that street. My brother Wallace and I both got [our feet] in the mud, and could not get out, and of course, child-like, we began to cry, for we thought we would have to stay there. But looking up, I beheld the loving friend of children, the Prophet Joseph [Smith], coming to us. He soon had us on higher and drier ground. Then he stooped down and cleaned the mud from our little, heavy-laden shoes, took his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped our tear-stained faces. He spoke kind and cheering words to us, and sent us on our way to school rejoicing."¹

Kindness in the home

There is no substitute for kindness in the home. This lesson I learned from my father. He always listened to my mother's advice. As a result, he was a better, wiser, and kinder man.

I have tried to follow my father's example and listen to my wife's point of view. I value her opinion. For example, when my wife begins a sentence with the words "I should think you would . . .," I instantly

pay attention and begin searching my mind for something I may have done wrong. Oftentimes before my wife has finished her sentence, I have already planned out in my mind a magnificent apology.

In truth, my wife is a model of kindness, gentleness, and compassion. And her insight, counsel, and support have been invaluable to me. Because of her, I too am a wiser and kinder person.

The things you say, the tone of your voice, the anger or calm of your words—these things are noticed by your children and by others. They see and learn both the kind and the unkind things we say or do. Nothing exposes our true selves more than how we treat one another in the home.

Build others rather than criticize

I often wonder why some feel they must be critical of others. It gets in their blood, I suppose, and it becomes so natural, they often don't even think about it. They seem to criticize everyone—the way Sister Jones leads the music, the way Brother Smith teaches a lesson or plants his garden.

Even when we think we are doing no harm by critical remarks, consequences often follow. I am reminded of a boy who handed a donation envelope to his bishop and told him it was for him. The bishop, using this as a teaching moment, explained to the boy that he should mark on the donation slip whether it was for tithing, fast offerings, or something else. The boy insisted the money was for the bishop himself. When the bishop asked why, the boy replied, "Because my father says you're one of the poorest bishops we've ever had."

The Church is not a place where perfect people gather to say perfect things or have perfect thoughts or have perfect feelings. The Church is a place where imperfect people gather to provide encouragement, support, and service to each other as we press on in our journey to return to our Heavenly Father.

Each one of us will travel a different road during this life. Each progresses at a different rate. Temptations that trouble your brother may not challenge you at all. Strengths that you possess may seem impossible to another.

Never look down on those who are less perfect than you. Don't be upset because someone can't sew as well as you, can't throw as well as you, can't row or hoe as well as you.

We are all children of our Heavenly Father. And we are here with the same purpose: to learn to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves.²

One way you can measure your value in the kingdom of God is to ask, "How well am I doing in helping others reach their potential? Do I support others in the Church, or do I criticize them?"

If you are criticizing others, you are weakening the Church. If you are building others, you are building the kingdom of God. As Heavenly Father is kind, we also should be kind to others.

Elder Talmage helps strangers in distress

Elder James E. Talmage, a man who is remembered for his doctrinal teachings, showed great kindness to a neighbor family in distress. They were complete strangers to him. Before he was an Apostle, as a young father he became aware of great suffering at a neighbor's home whose large family was stricken with the dreaded diphtheria. He did not care that they were not members of the Church; his kindness and charity moved him to act. The Relief Society was desperately trying to find people to help, but no one would because of the contagious nature of the disease.

When he arrived, James found one toddler already dead and two others who were in agony from the disease. He immediately went to work, cleaning the untidy house, preparing the young body for burial,

cleaning and providing for the other sick children—spending the entire day doing so. He came back the next morning to find that one more of the children had died during the night. A third child was still suffering terribly. He wrote in his journal:

"She clung to my neck, . . . ofttimes coughing [germs] on my face and clothing, . . . yet I could not put her from me. During the half hour immediately preceding her death, I walked the floor with the little creature in my arms. She died in agony at 10 a.m."

The three children had all departed within the space of 24 hours. He then assisted the family with the burial arrangements and spoke at the graveside services.³ This he did all for a family of strangers. What a great example of Christlike kindness!

"Love them"

When we are filled with kindness, we are not judgmental. The Savior taught, "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven."⁴ He also taught that "with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."⁵

"But," you ask, "what if people are rude?"

Love them.

"If they are obnoxious?"

Love them.

"But what if they offend? Surely I must do something then?"

Love them.

"Wayward?"

The answer is the same. Be kind. Love them.

Why? In the scriptures, Jude taught, "And of some have compassion, making a difference."⁶

Who can tell what far-reaching impact we can have if we are only kind?

Be models of kindness

My brothers and sisters, the gospel of Jesus Christ transcends mortality. Our work here is but a shadow of greater and unimaginable things to come.

The heavens opened to the Prophet Joseph Smith. He saw the living God and His Son, Jesus the Christ.

In our day a prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, walks the earth and provides direction for our time.

As our Heavenly Father loves us, we also should love His children.

May we be models of kindness. May we ever live up to the words of the Savior:

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”⁷

Of these truths I bear witness in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Margarette McIntire Burgess, in *Juvenile Instructor*, Jan. 15, 1892, 66–67.
2. See Mark 12:30–31.
3. See John R. Talmage, *The Talmage Story: Life of James E. Talmage—Educator, Scientist, Apostle* (1972), 112–14.
4. Luke 6:37.
5. Matthew 7:2.
6. Jude 1:22.
7. John 13:35.

Elder Richard G. Scott

The power of *Preach My Gospel*

I am very grateful to be able to discuss with you an exciting development that will make it easier for each of us to share with loved ones and friends the glorious message of the restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ. It has ignited the minds and hearts of our missionaries, for it equips them to teach their message with power and to bear testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ and of His prophet Joseph Smith without the constraint of a prescribed dialogue. Developed primarily for full-time missionary use, this material has also proven to be most beneficial for parents who want to help children prepare for a mission. Young men and women as well as some couples are using the resource to get a head start before entering the missionary training centers. Some priesthood leaders have confirmed its worth in preparing Aaronic Priesthood brethren for missions. This tool is invaluable in assisting priesthood and auxiliary efforts to help new members become stronger in testimony and obedience. I speak of this new guide, *Preach My Gospel*, and its attendant plan-

ning tools, such as this *Missionary Daily Planner*.

May I share with you why I am so enthusiastic about *Preach My Gospel*? It has focused our missionary effort as never before. For years I have asked groups of missionaries, “What is the purpose of your mission?” Their individual responses differed greatly. Most did not have any concrete purpose to organize their efforts. Page 1 of this guide powerfully focuses missionaries on their true purpose: “Invite others to come unto Christ by helping them receive the restored gospel through faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement, repentance, baptism, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end.” The contents then suggest how to do that as led by the Spirit.

A new focus for a changed world

The former missionary materials were effective for their time, but the world has changed dramatically. The values which form the bedrock foundation of society are being assaulted by Satan and his allies. There has been an urgent need for an im-

proved way to share the fulness of the truth that God has placed on earth again. This includes an understanding of God's plan of happiness and of how it has been returned to earth through His singular prophet, Joseph Smith; also that the Church of Jesus Christ with the priesthood authority to act in His name is once again on earth in its fulness.

Well did President Hinckley teach:

"For many years now we have had a standard set of missionary lessons. Great good has come of this. . . . But unfortunately this method, in all too many cases, has resulted in a memorized presentation, lacking in Spirit and in personal conviction. . . .

"[Missionaries] should master the concepts of the lessons. But they should . . . teach the concepts in their own words under the guiding influence of the Holy Spirit."¹

That principle is a foundation pillar of *Preach My Gospel*. Missionaries throughout the world now get into their minds and hearts the message of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the plan of salvation, essential commandments, and the laws and ordinances of the gospel. These lessons are then given in their own words as guided by the Spirit. This focus has dramatically improved the effectiveness of missionaries who use it.

Overview of *Preach My Gospel*

Preach My Gospel contains chapters that give extremely valuable information on how to recognize and understand the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

There are scriptures on how to effectively study and how to refine personal teaching skills.

One chapter explains why the Book of Mormon is the keystone of our religion, how it can answer profound questions of the soul, how it can build faith and help others draw closer to God. Additional instruction shows how the Book of Mormon

is a tangible resource that an individual can use to confirm the truthfulness of our message.

A missionary is taught how to seek Christlike attributes such as hope, charity, and love, for love is the foundation of all meaningful missionary service.

Excellent suggestions are given for learning a mission language.

Clear, effective planning tools are provided to help a missionary use time more wisely.

Proven methods are shared to identify and prepare individuals to teach.

Practical guidance is given to help individuals make and keep commitments that lead to baptism, confirmation, and retention.

This guide contains tools to integrate the efforts of full-time missionaries, stake and ward leaders, and members. With that help, more new members can make a more secure transition into the family of the Church. There is greater assurance that those who, through baptism and confirmation, take upon themselves the name of Jesus Christ and commit to obey His commandments will receive His promised blessings throughout life.

Improvements in missionaries' teaching

Using the inspired content of *Preach My Gospel*, many missionaries have made dramatic improvements in their capacity to teach with conviction and to invite the confirming witness of the Holy Ghost. Recently I asked two assistants to a mission president to share the vision of Joseph Smith while I acted as the investigator. I planned to vigorously challenge them to see how they would respond. Yet the sincerity of their message, the purity of their intent, the skill with which it was delivered, even in a practice session, was so compelling that I could not do it.

You can observe this improvement yourself. Invite missionaries to present the first lesson to your family in your home.

Better yet, invite neighbors to come to your home to be taught by missionaries. Guided by the Spirit, in their own words they will explain how Father in Heaven has used prophets throughout the ages to communicate His plan of happiness to His children. Feel their testimony as they bear witness of the sublime vision in which God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to Joseph Smith. The missionaries will skillfully unfold the subsequent events that restored the fulness of the gospel, with the authority to act in the name of God, on earth again. You can also accompany missionaries as they teach others these inspiring truths. Your presence will greatly strengthen those who hear these precious truths for the first time.

Process of preparing *Preach My Gospel*

Intensive effort on the part of the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve, other General Authorities, and most capable teams of devoted, experienced staff members produced *Preach My Gospel* and its planning tools. Those who participated in its development are witnesses of the inspired direction of the Lord through the Holy Ghost in the conception, framing, and finalization of the materials in *Preach My Gospel*.

After extensive testing in 14 missions, *Preach My Gospel* was adjusted. That result was reviewed, modified, and approved by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve. On October 15, 2004, a worldwide satellite broadcast introduced mission presidents and missionary leaders to *Preach My Gospel*. Every missionary throughout the world was given an English copy. While many did not speak English, they felt part of the renewal of our missionary effort. Interestingly, some foreign-language-speaking missionaries were motivated to learn English. Early this year, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, and Portuguese versions of *Preach My Gospel* were distributed. By the end of the year, we anticipate that the guide will

be available in most of the languages spoken by missionaries.

All can benefit from *Preach My Gospel*

Missionaries are not alone in benefiting from *Preach My Gospel*:

- One mission president's wife studied and pondered every word in *Preach My Gospel*, including every scriptural reference. She then did something she had lacked the courage to do—she invited a close relative to study and ponder the Book of Mormon. That individual accepted her invitation and has been greatly benefited.

- Another family uses *Preach My Gospel* to help prepare their children for missions. They reported, "Our 17-year-old was the first to get an assignment. As expected, he looked for the shortest segment in the book. His lesson, however, was a 20-minute heartfelt expression of the principles, complete with scriptures and testimony."

- From a father preparing a son for missionary service: "*Preach My Gospel* has . . . given me perspective and clearer understanding of the purpose of life, my duties and responsibilities as a member of the Church, as a father, and as a husband. . . . It has also given me concrete tools to better pursue that journey." His son was called to be a missionary yesterday.

Much good has been accomplished in the brief seven months since *Preach My Gospel* was introduced, but the best is yet to come as we all become more proficient in the use of this extraordinary missionary tool.

Rise to a new sense of commitment

I encourage you to use these materials in your presidencies, priesthood executive committee meetings, and ward councils to ensure that those who take upon themselves the covenants of baptism receive throughout their lives the full fruits of Church membership. Through the use of the new Progress Record for individuals

preparing for baptism, missionary and member efforts can be powerfully coordinated. I am confident that more new converts will find it easier to fulfill their desire to remain active, as members and missionaries work together using the principles in *Preach My Gospel*.

The First Presidency message in *Preach My Gospel* provides great motivation to missionaries. Perhaps it will encourage you in your own missionary efforts. It states:

“There is no more compelling work than this. . . . *Preach My Gospel* is intended to help you be a better-prepared, more spiritually mature missionary and a more persuasive teacher. . . . We challenge you to rise to a new sense of commitment to assist our Father in Heaven in His glorious work. . . . The Lord will reward and richly bless you as you humbly and prayerfully serve Him.”²

Can you catch the vision? You’ll be as excited as I am when in your personal life you begin to understand and use this missionary tool. Unlike prior full-time missionary resources, *Preach My Gospel* is available to any leader or member through Church distribution.

Probably the greatest benefit of *Preach My Gospel* will be seen in the lives of returned missionaries, who will be stronger parents, more able Church leaders, and better professionals because of the growth that comes from understanding and applying its inspired content.

On behalf of our missionaries worldwide, we express profound gratitude to all

who have participated in the preparation, printing, and distribution of *Preach My Gospel*. We are grateful for each mission president and missionary who is mastering its effective use. Ultimately we are grateful to the Lord for His inspiration. I encourage you to find out how this extraordinary resource can help in your missionary efforts, either as a parent preparing a child for a mission, a Church leader helping new converts, a member sharing the gospel, or an individual getting ready to serve. May the Savior bless and inspire you as you do so, for He lives. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. “Missionary Service,” *First Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Jan. 11, 2003, 19.
2. *Preach My Gospel* (2004), v.

President Monson

Thank you, Elders Wirthlin and Scott. The choir and congregation will now sing “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet.”

At the conclusion of the singing, Elders Harold G. Hillam and Lynn G. Robbins of the Seventy will address us. They will be followed by Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The choir and congregation sang “We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet.”

Elder Harold G. Hillam

Influence of one man who left the Church

One of the talks that has had an everlasting impression on me is one given in a Saturday evening session of a stake conference years ago. The talk was given by a young mother. Here’s what she said:

“I have been doing the genealogy of my great-grandfather. He and his large family of sons and daughters were members of the Church.

“My great-grandfather,” she said, “left church one Sunday with his family, and they never returned—no indication why.”

She then said, "In my research, I have found that my great-grandfather has over 1,000 descendants."

And then she said, and this is the part I have not been able to forget, "Of those 1,000 descendants, I am the only one active in the Church today."

As she said these words, I found myself thinking, "Is it only 1,000, or could it be more?"

The answer is apparent. The spiritual influence that family might have had on their neighbors and friends did not happen. None of his sons or any of his daughters served as missionaries, and those they would have touched with their testimonies were not baptized, and those who were not baptized did not go on missions. Yes, there are probably many thousands who are not in the Church today, and not in this very meeting, because of that great-grandfather's decision.

As I heard her talk, I found myself thinking, "What a tragedy! Perhaps if I had been there at that time, I could have said something to the father, to the family, to the priesthood leaders that might have helped to prevent such a calamity to their family and to so many in the future generations that would follow."

Well, that opportunity of the past is lost. But we can now look to the present and to the future. I would say to those who find themselves in the same position as that great-grandfather: Would you consider what you might be doing to your family and to all those who come after you? Would you ponder the effects of your thoughts and your actions?

Put the doctrine to the test

If there are any concerns about Church doctrine, consider the counsel given by President Gordon B. Hinckley to a large meeting of over 2,000 members in Paris, France, last year. He said: "I plead with you, my brothers and sisters, that if you

have any doubt concerning any doctrine of this Church, that you put it to the test. Try it. Live the principle. Get on your knees and pray about it, and God will bless you with a knowledge of the truth of this work."

Do not let pride deny posterity blessings

If you feel you have been wronged, be ready to forgive. If there is, for some reason, an unpleasant memory, let it go. Where necessary, talk to your bishop; talk to your stake president.

To all, but especially to those who someday will be great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers, your eternal blessings and those of your posterity are far more important than any prideful reason which would deny you and so many others of such important blessings. In the Book of Mormon, King Benjamin reminds us:

"And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness" (Mosiah 2:41).

Children can help steady the boat

To you who are children in the homes of future errant great-grandfathers, you can continue to stand faithful; you can be a good example in the home and to those around you. You can do your part to bring peace and harmony in the home and with your associates. You can be the solution, and not the cause, of problems. Remember in the Book of Mormon when Father Lehi began to murmur, it was his righteous son Nephi who gave encouragement and found solutions to problems. So many times it is the righteous children who are able to steady the boat while sailing in turbulent waters.

The love of a stake president

To you who are bishops and stake presidents, how I wish you could have been part of the meeting I attended with a handful of regional representatives. We heard Elder L. Tom Perry as he compared those who are prospective elders and those who are not active—the future great-grandfathers—to a thermometer. We were reminded that many of those individuals are more than just warm. They would come back if someone would just encourage and show the way.

I would like to tell you of a stake conference I was assigned to attend. It was a reorganization; the stake president and his counselors would be released, and a new presidency would be called. The stake president was young and had served wonderfully for almost 10 years. He was a spiritual giant, but he was also an administrative giant. In my personal interview with him, he told me how he had delegated much of the responsibility for the stake functions to his counselors and to the high council and had thus freed himself to interview those who needed encouragement. Individuals and couples were invited to come to his office. There he got to know them, counseled with them, and invited them to do better, to put their lives in order, and to receive the blessings available to those who follow the Lord. He helped them by putting them in the care of a capable leader, a teacher who helped them to understand the beauties of the doctrine. Then he told me that

in these interviews he would often ask if they would like a blessing. “I have placed my hands on the heads of many members of the stake,” he said.

The next day in the general session of the stake conference, I doubt I have ever seen so many tears—not because they felt the president should not be released, but for the deep love of a young stake president who had blessed their lives. I felt prompted to ask, “How many of you have had the hands of the president on your heads?” I was amazed at the number of people who raised their hands. I thought to myself at the time, “How many of these people will bless the name of this great man, not only now but throughout the eternities?” Yes, these will be the great-grandfathers who will, because of this loving leader, leave a legacy of generations of thousands who will call him blessed.

The worth of souls

When we see the effect one person can have on the lives of so many, it perhaps is no wonder that the Lord reminded us, “Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God” (D&C 18:10).

I pray we all might consider what we can do individually to assist those who will be the future great-grandparents, whether a little child, a teenager, or an adult, so that each will leave a righteous legacy of those who know and love the Lord. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Lynn G. Robbins

Sacrifice is never convenient

In Charles Dickens’s timeless classic *A Christmas Carol*, Bob Cratchit hoped to spend Christmas Day with his family. “‘If quite *convenient*, Sir,’” he asked his employer, Mr. Scrooge.

“‘It’s *not convenient*,’ said Scrooge, ‘and it’s not fair. If I was to stop half-a-crown for it, you’d think yourself ill used.’ . . .

“‘And yet,’ said Scrooge, ‘you don’t think *me* ill-used, when I pay a day’s wages for no work.’”

“The clerk observed that it was only once a year.

“‘A poor excuse for picking a man’s pocket every twenty-fifth of December!’ said Scrooge.”¹

For Scrooge—as with any selfish, or “natural,” man—sacrifice is never *convenient*.

The natural man has a tendency to think only of himself—not only to place himself first, but rarely, if ever, to place anyone else second, including God. For the natural man, sacrifice does not come naturally. He has an insatiable appetite for more. His so-called needs always seem to outpace his income so that having “enough” is forever out of reach, just as it was for the miser Scrooge.

Sacrifice is a hallmark of the faithful

Because the natural man tends to hoard or consume everything, the Lord wisely commanded ancient Israel to sacrifice not the last and poorest of the flock, but the firstlings—not the leftovers of the field, but the firstfruits (see Deuteronomy 26:2; Mosiah 2:3; Moses 5:5). Genuine sacrifice has been a hallmark of the faithful from the beginning.

Among those who do *not* sacrifice there are two extremes: one is the rich, gluttonous man who won’t and the other is the poor, destitute man who believes he can’t. But how can you ask someone who is starving to eat less? *Is* there a level of poverty *so* low that sacrifice should not be expected or a family so destitute that paying tithing should cease to be required?

Sacrifice made by the widow of Zarephath

The Lord often teaches using extreme circumstances to illustrate a principle. The story of the widow of Zarephath is an example of extreme poverty used to teach the doctrine that mercy cannot rob sacrifice any more than it can rob justice. In fact, the

truer measure of sacrifice isn’t so much what one gives to sacrifice as what one sacrifices to give (see Mark 12:43). Faith isn’t tested so much when the cupboard is full as when it is bare. In these defining moments, the crisis doesn’t create one’s character—it reveals it. The crisis is the test.

The widow of Zarephath lived in the days of the prophet Elijah, by whose word the Lord brought a drought upon the land for three and a half years (see Luke 4:25). The famine grew so severe that many were finally at the point of death. This is the circumstance in which we find the widow.

The Lord says to Elijah, “Arise, get thee to Zarephath . . . : behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee” (1 Kings 17:9). It is interesting that Elijah is not told to go to Zarephath until the widow and her son are at the point of death. It is at this extreme moment—facing starvation—that her faith will be tested.

As he comes into the city, he sees her gathering sticks.

“And he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.

“And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.

“And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die” (verses 10–12).

A “handful of meal” would be very little indeed, perhaps just enough for one serving, which makes Elijah’s response intriguing. Listen: “And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake *first*” (v. 13; italics added).

Now doesn’t that sound selfish, asking not just for the first piece, but possibly the only piece? Didn’t our parents teach us to let other people go first and especially for

a gentleman to let a lady go first, let alone a starving widow? Her choice—does she eat, or does she sacrifice her last meal and hasten death? Perhaps she will sacrifice her own food, but could she sacrifice the food meant for her starving son?

Elijah understood the doctrine that blessings come *after* the trial of our faith (see Ether 12:6; D&C 132:5). He wasn't being selfish. As the Lord's servant, Elijah was there to give, not to take. Continuing from the narrative:

"But make me thereof a little cake *first* [the firstlings], and bring it unto me, and *after* make for thee and for thy son.

"For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.

"And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.

"And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah" (verses 13–16; italics added).

Paying tithing even when destitute

One reason the Lord illustrates doctrines with the most extreme circumstances is to eliminate excuses. If the Lord expects even the poorest widow to pay her mite, where does that leave all others who find that it is not *convenient* or easy to sacrifice?

No bishop, no missionary should ever hesitate or lack the faith to teach the law of tithing to the poor. The sentiment of "They can't *afford* to" needs to be replaced with "They can't afford *not* to."

One of the first things a bishop *must* do to help the needy is ask them to pay their tithing. Like the widow, if a destitute family is faced with the decision of paying their tithing or eating, they should pay their tithing. The bishop can help them with their food and other basic needs until they become self-reliant.

In October of 1998, Hurricane Mitch devastated many parts of Central America. President Gordon B. Hinckley was very concerned for the victims of this disaster, many of whom lost everything—food, clothing, and household goods. He visited the Saints in the cities of San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa, Honduras; and Managua, Nicaragua. And like the words of the loving prophet Elijah to a starving widow, this modern prophet's message in each city was similar—to sacrifice and be obedient to the law of tithing.

But how can you ask someone so destitute to sacrifice? President Hinckley knew that the food and clothing shipments they received would help them survive the crisis, but his concern and love for them went far beyond that. As important as humanitarian aid is, he knew that the most important assistance comes from God, not from man. The prophet wanted to help them unlock the windows of heaven as promised by the Lord in the book of Malachi (see Malachi 3:10; Mosiah 2:24).

President Hinckley taught them that if they would pay their tithing, they would always have food on their tables, they would always have clothing on their backs, and they would always have a roof over their heads.

Give the firstfruits, not the leftovers

When serving a meal, it is much easier to set one more plate at the beginning of the meal than it is to find food for a latecomer once the meal is over and the food has been served. Likewise, isn't it actually easier to give the Lord the firstlings or the firstfruits than it is to hope that there are sufficient "leftovers" for Him? As the founder of our feast, shouldn't *He* be the guest of honor, the first to be served?

My loving mother, Evelyn Robbins, taught me the law of tithing when I was four years old. She gave me an empty Band-Aid box, the tin kind with a snapping

lid. She taught me to keep my tithing pennies in it and then take it to the bishop. I am eternally grateful for her, for that Band-Aid box, and for the blessings that have come from paying tithing.

Obey the law of sacrifice more fully

In *A Christmas Carol*, Mr. Scrooge changed his ways—he was not the man he had been. Likewise, this is the gospel of repentance. If the Spirit is prompting us to more fully obey the law of sacrifice in our

lives, may we begin making that change today.

I am so grateful for the Savior, who was the perfect example of obedience through sacrifice—who offered “himself a sacrifice for sin” and became, in Lehi’s words, “the *firstfruits* unto God” (2 Nephi 2:7, 9; italics added). I bear witness of Him and of these, His doctrines, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTE

1. *The Annotated Christmas Carol*, ed. Michael Patrick Hearn (1976), 69; italics added.

Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf

Only six months ago you faithful members of the Church of Jesus Christ sustained me as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. This calling came as a great surprise to many, but especially to our grandchildren, who said, “But he is our *Opä*! He is just a regular person. He played with us, and he used to cut our hair!”

After the October general conference, my wife and I talked to our children on the telephone, and one of our grandsons said, “Since we were so far away from you and could not be with you in Salt Lake City, at least you should have waved to us when you were giving your conference talk.” We have not yet been with our children and grandchildren until this general conference, and so I wave today, hoping to make a grandson happy. I also wave to all of you wonderful members, whose prayers and love are so important and appreciated by my wife and me.

Operating the bellows of an old organ

In my growing-up years in Germany, I attended church in many different locations and circumstances—in humble back rooms, in impressive villas, and in very functional, modern chapels. All of these buildings had

one important factor in common: the Spirit of God was present; the love of the Savior could be felt as we assembled as a branch or ward family.

The Zwickau chapel had an old air-driven organ. Every Sunday a young man was assigned to push up and down the sturdy lever that operated the bellows to make the organ work. Even before I was an Aaronic Priesthood bearer, I sometimes had the great privilege to assist in this important task.

While the congregation sang our beloved hymns of the Restoration, I pumped with all my strength so the organ would not run out of wind. The eyes of the organist unmistakably indicated whether I was doing fine or needed to increase my efforts quickly. I always felt honored by the importance of this duty and the trust that the organist had placed in me. It was a wonderful feeling of accomplishment to have a responsibility and to be part of this great work.

A stained-glass window of the First Vision

There was an additional benefit that came from this assignment: the bellows operator sat in a seat that offered a great view

of a stained-glass window that beautified the front part of the chapel. The stained glass portrayed the First Vision, with Joseph Smith kneeling in the Sacred Grove, looking up toward heaven and into a pillar of light.

During the hymns of the congregation and even during talks and testimonies given by our members, I often looked at this depiction of a most sacred moment in world history. In my mind's eye I saw Joseph receiving knowledge, witness, and divine instructions as he became a blessed instrument in the hand of our Heavenly Father.

I felt a special spirit while looking at the beautiful scene in this window picture of a believing young boy in a sacred grove who made a courageous decision to pray earnestly to our Heavenly Father, who listened and responded lovingly to him.

Holy Ghost testifies of the First Vision

Here I was, a young boy in post-World War II Germany, living in a city in ruins, thousands of miles away from Palmyra in North America and more than a hundred years after the event actually took place. By the universal power of the Holy Ghost, I felt in my heart and in my mind that it was true, that Joseph Smith saw God and Jesus Christ and heard Their voices. The Spirit of God comforted my soul at this young age with an assurance of the reality of this sacred moment that resulted in the beginning of a worldwide movement destined to “roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth” (D&C 65:2). I believed Joseph Smith's testimony of that glorious experience in the Sacred Grove then, and I know it now. God has spoken to mankind again!

Looking back, I am grateful for so many friends who helped me in my youth to gain a testimony of the restored Church of Jesus Christ. First I exercised simple faith in their testimonies, and then I received the divine witness of the Spirit to

my mind and to my heart. I count Joseph Smith among those whose testimony of Christ helped me to develop my own testimony of the Savior. Before I recognized the tutoring of the Spirit testifying to me that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, my youthful heart felt that he was a friend of God and would therefore, quite naturally, also be a friend of mine. I knew I could trust Joseph Smith.

Testimony strengthened by others

The scriptures teach us that spiritual gifts are given to those who ask of God, who love Him, and who keep His commandments (see D&C 46:9). “All have not every gift given unto them; for there are many gifts, and to every man is given a gift by the Spirit of God. To some is given one, and to some is given another, that all may be profited thereby” (D&C 46:11–12).

Today I know that my young testimony benefited greatly from the testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith and many friends in the Church who knew “by the Holy Ghost . . . that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world” (D&C 46:13). Their good examples, caring love, and helping hands blessed me to receive another special gift of the Spirit described in the scriptures as I was yearning for more light and truth: “To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue [faithfully]” (D&C 46:14). What a wonderful and precious gift this is!

How to receive the gift of faith

As we truly humble ourselves, we will be blessed with this gift to have faith and to hope for things which are not seen but are true (see Alma 32:21). As we experiment upon the words given to us by the scriptures and the living prophets—even if we have only a desire to believe—and do not resist the Spirit of the Lord, our souls will be enlarged and our understanding will be enlightened (see Alma 32:26–28).

The Savior Himself explained this merciful principle clearly to all the world in His great intercessory prayer, given not only for His Apostles but for all the Saints, even for us today, wherever we might be living. He said:

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may *believe* that thou hast sent me” (John 17:20–21; italics added).

First Vision helps us believe in Christ

This is how Joseph Smith’s First Vision blesses our own personal lives, the lives of families, and eventually the whole human family: we come to believe in Jesus Christ through the testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Prophets and apostles throughout the history of mankind have had divine manifestations similar to Joseph’s. Moses saw God face-to-face and learned that he was a son of God “in the similitude of [His] Only Begotten” (see Moses 1:1–6). The Apostle Paul testified that the resurrected Jesus Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus and made Paul one of His great missionaries (see Acts 26:9–23). Hearing Paul’s witness of his heavenly vision during the trial at Caesarea, the powerful King Agrippa admitted, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28).

And there were many other ancient prophets who also bore powerful testimony of Christ. All of these manifestations, ancient and modern, lead those who believe to the divine source of all righteousness and hope—to God, our Heavenly Father, and to His Son, Jesus Christ.

The fruits of the First Vision

God has spoken to Joseph Smith for the purpose of blessing all of God’s chil-

dren with His mercy and love, even in times of uncertainties and insecurities, of wars and rumors of wars, of natural and personal disasters. The Savior said, “Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive” (3 Nephi 9:14). And all who accept this invitation will be “encircled about with the matchless bounty of his love” (Alma 26:15).

Through faith in the personal witness of the Prophet Joseph and the reality of the First Vision, through study and prayer, deep and sincere, we will be blessed with a firm faith in the Savior of the world, who spoke to Joseph “on the morning of eighteenth hundred and twenty” (Joseph Smith—History 1:14).

Faith in Jesus Christ and a testimony of Him and His universal Atonement is not just a doctrine with great theological value. Such faith is a universal gift, glorious for all cultural regions of this earth, irrespective of language, race, color, nationality, or socioeconomic circumstance. The powers of reason may be used to try to understand this gift, but those who feel its effects most deeply are those who are willing to accept its blessings, which come from a pure and clean life of following the path of true repentance and living the commandments of God.

Gratitude for the Prophet Joseph Smith

As we remember and honor the Prophet Joseph Smith, my heart reaches out to him in gratitude. He was a good, honest, humble, intelligent, and courageous young man with a heart of gold and an unshaken faith in God. He had integrity. In response to his humble prayer, the heavens opened again. Joseph Smith had actually seen a vision. He knew it, and he knew that God knew it, and he could not deny it. (See Joseph Smith—History 1:25.)

Through his work and sacrifice, I now have a true understanding of our Heavenly Father and His Son, our Redeemer and Savior, Jesus Christ, and I can feel the power of the Holy Ghost and know of Heavenly Father's plan for us, His children. For me, these are truly the fruits of the First Vision.

I am grateful that early in my life I was blessed with a simple faith that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, that he saw God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, in a vision. He translated the Book of Mormon by the gift and power of God. That testimony has been confirmed to me over and over again.

As one of the least among you, but in my calling as one of the Apostles of Jesus Christ, I testify that He truly lives, that He is the Messiah. I do have a personal witness of Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind. I received this knowledge by the unspeakable peace and power of the Spirit of God. The desire of my heart and of my mind is to be pure and faithful in serving Him now and forever.

I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

Thank you, brethren. We've been richly fed.

We remind the brethren of the general priesthood meeting, which will convene in the Conference Center this evening at 6:00 p.m. mountain standard time. We call your attention to the need to move your clocks ahead one hour before retiring tonight because of the change to daylight saving time.

The nationwide Tabernacle Choir broadcast tomorrow morning will be from 9:30 to 10:00 a.m. mountain daylight time. The Sunday morning session of conference will immediately follow.

We thank the combined choir from the Ogden and Logan Utah Institutes for the beautiful music that they have provided this afternoon.

Our concluding speaker at this session will be Elder Robert D. Hales of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Following his remarks, the choir will sing "Come, Come, Ye Saints." At the conclusion of the singing, the benediction will be offered by Elder W. Rolfe Kerr of the Seventy.

Elder Robert D. Hales

Another plea for senior missionaries

Four years ago I spoke in this setting about couples serving full-time missions. My prayer was that "the Holy Ghost [would] touch hearts, and somewhere a spouse . . . [would] quietly nudge his or her companion, and a moment of truth [—a moment of decision—would] occur."¹ One sister later wrote me about that experience. She said, "We were sitting in the comfort of our family room enjoying conference on television. . . . As you spoke, my heart was touched so deeply. I looked over at my husband, and he looked at me. That moment changed my life forever."

If you are or will soon be the age of a senior missionary, I come to you this afternoon to witness of the blessings that can change your life forever. Your Heavenly Father needs you. His work, under the direction of our Savior Jesus Christ, needs what you are uniquely prepared to give. Every missionary experience requires faith, sacrifice, and service, and these are always followed by an outpouring of blessings.

The five F's

As we discuss these blessings, you will naturally consider what I have called the four F's: fear, family concerns, finding the

right mission opportunity, and financial challenges.² May I yet add another more important and powerful F—faith. Only through our faith can we heed God's counsel to “choose ye this day, whom ye will serve”³—“to serve the Lord God who made you.”⁴ And only through a *trial* of our faith can we receive the miraculous blessings we seek for ourselves and our families. “For if there be no faith among the children of men God can do no miracle among them; wherefore, he showed not himself until *after* their faith.”⁵

Meeting fear with faith

Allow me to share some of the miraculous blessings from letters and accounts I have received over the past four years. A humble couple from Idaho met fear with faith when the Lord called them to Russia. They wrote the following acceptance letter: “No one would have imagined we would be called to this assignment. We have no idea how we will learn the language or manage to be of service, and although we accept with much trepidation, going completely on faith, we know that the Lord and His prophet know more than we do where we should serve.”

Ten months later the Stockholm Sweden Temple welcomed 30 Saints from a small branch in Russia led by this couple from Idaho who had barely begun to learn the Russian language. The scriptures tell us, “God has provided a means that man, through faith, might work mighty miracles.”⁶ Thus, God's work is carried out by His children, “that faith also might increase in the earth, . . . that the fulness of my gospel might be proclaimed by the weak and the simple unto the ends of the world.”⁷

“I will provide for their families”

Another couple faced family concerns with faith. A faithful sister wrote: “The decision to serve a mission was not hard. But

my 90-year-old mother was extremely apprehensive about our leaving. She took great comfort when she heard that our families would be blessed as we serve.”

A faithful brother expressed similar concerns about leaving his elderly parents, to which his father responded, “Don't use your mother and me as an excuse not to go on a mission with your wife. You pray about it and follow the guidance of the Spirit.”

To an earlier generation of missionaries called to leave their families, the Lord offered this reassurance: “And if they will do this in all lowliness of heart, . . . I, the Lord, give unto them a promise that I will provide for their families.”⁸

Certainly family concerns are real and should not be considered lightly. But we cannot meet our family challenges without the blessings of the Lord; and when we sacrifice to serve as full-time missionary couples, those blessings will flow. For example, one couple worried about leaving their youngest daughter, who was no longer active in the Church. Her faithful father wrote:

“We prayed for her continually and fasted regularly. Then, during general conference, the Spirit whispered to me, ‘If you will serve, you will not have to worry about your daughter anymore.’ So we met with our bishop. The week after we received our call, she and her boyfriend announced they were engaged. Before we left for Africa, we had a wedding in our home. [Then we gathered our family together and] held a family council. . . . I bore testimony of the Lord and Joseph Smith . . . and told them I would like to give each of them a father's blessing. I started with the oldest son and then his wife and proceeded to the youngest . . . [including our new son-in-law].”

As we consider couple missionary service, it is appropriate to involve our families in the same way. In family council meetings, we can give our children the opportunity to express their support, offer special

assistance we may need, and receive priesthood blessings to sustain them in our absence. Where appropriate, we may be able to receive priesthood blessings from them as well. As the faithful father in this story blessed his family members, his son-in-law felt the influence of the Holy Ghost. The father wrote:

“By the end of our first year [the] heart [of our son-in-law] began to soften toward the Church. Just before we returned home from our mission, he and our daughter came to visit us. In his suitcase was the first set of Sunday clothes he had ever owned. They came to church with us, and after we returned home he was baptized. A year later they were sealed in the temple.”⁹

Though the details of this story may be unique, the principle is true for all who say to the Lord, “I’ll go where you want me to go.”¹⁰ I testify that as we put our trust in the Lord, He will find the right missionary opportunity for us. As He said, “If any man serve me, him will my Father honour.”¹¹

If you lack the means

In considering missionary opportunities, many couples throughout the world have an abundant desire to serve but lack abundant means. If this is your situation, remember that the right mission call may not be to a far-off country with a strange-sounding name. The right call for you may be within your stake or area. “Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.”¹² Counsel with your extended family and your bishop or branch president. As the Lord’s servants understand your temporal situation, you will be able to receive the eternal blessings of full-time missionary service.

If you cannot serve because of serious extenuating circumstances, would you consider making a financial contribution to help those who can? The reasonable sacrifice of your means will not only bless other missionaries and those they serve; it will bless you and your family as well.

Marvelous blessings of missionary service

Now, to those who were not able to serve a mission in their youth, may I speak directly to you. Perhaps over the years you have been burdened by feelings of regret or felt less than adequate because you did not have a missionary opportunity to serve and grow when you were younger. My advice to you: look forward, not back. Begin preparing for your mission as a senior missionary couple today! Save a little money each month. Study the scriptures. Accept Church callings. Pray to feel the Lord’s love for others and receive His love and confidence in you. You can one day claim *all* the blessings of missionary service!

And what marvelous blessings they are! After 51 years of marriage, I was asked, “What part of life would you want to live over again?” I did not hesitate to reply, “When my wife and I served together in the great missionary work of the Lord.” The sentiments of another missionary couple echo those of my wife and myself: “Our decision to go on a mission brought new vigor, new emotions, new friends, new places, new challenges. It brought us closer together as husband and wife; we had a common goal and a real partnership. And best of all, it brought new spiritual growth instead of spiritual retirement.” Brothers and sisters, let us not go into spiritual retirement.

Challenge to bishops, branch presidents

Now, may I extend a challenge to bishops and branch presidents throughout the world? Over the next six months, would it be possible for each of you to consider recommending one or more missionary couples beyond those presently planning to serve? Your greatest resource in meeting this challenge will be those senior members of your ward who have already served missions. In my own ward an inspired bishop called a special meeting of prospective and returned missionary couples. As we bore

our testimonies of sacrifice and service, the Spirit witnessed to us all that a call to serve is indeed a call to “know the richness of [the Lord’s] blessing[s].”¹³

I’ve heard of a stake president who has arranged a senior missionary class to inspire prospective missionary couples and help them prepare to serve. Priesthood leaders, as you prayerfully seek to encourage full-time missionary service, remember that when a couple is called, they not only help accomplish the work of the Lord throughout the world; they plant a seed of service in their families that will blossom for generations to come. I continue to be grateful for the influence of my parents, who served as couple missionaries in England and set an example for their posterity.

Seek a mission call

Now, to you prospective missionary couples, please do not wait for your bishop to meet with you about serving a mission! Go to him. Share your feelings. Where missionary service is concerned, the Lord expects us to express our desires. As we do, we can trust that the same Spirit that prompts us to seek a mission call will inspire a prophet to call us to the right assignment.

Couple missionaries make a difference

And there are so many calls! There are calls to teach the gospel to those who desire to receive the truth, including to youth in the Church Educational System; calls to work in welfare and humanitarian service; in temples; in family history centers, mission offices, and historic sites; calls to “do the greatest good unto thy fellow beings, and . . . promote the glory of him who is your Lord.”¹⁴

Consider these examples: A couple called to India helped a school for blind children build sanitary facilities and acquire braille typewriters. A couple in Hawaii nurtured a little branch of 20 members to 200

and prepared 70 members to attend the temple together. A couple in Peru arranged for medicine and Christmas toys to be provided to 550 children in an orphanage. A couple in Cambodia taught institute classes and gave leadership to a branch which, after only 10 months, grew to 180 members. A couple in Russia helped local farmers increase their yield of potatoes to 11 times that of the state farms, while a couple in the Philippines helped nearly 700 poorly nourished families learn to raise rabbits and cultivate vegetable gardens. A couple in Pennsylvania assisted 60 individuals, half of them members of other faiths, in preparing their family genealogical records. A couple in Ghana helped drill and refurbish wells, bringing water to 190,000 people in villages and refugee camps.

Whether or not the results of every mission are this obvious to mortal eyes, all those who serve make an invaluable contribution in the sight of the Lord, for all “have compassion, making a difference.”¹⁵ Couple missionaries are role models and examples of strength to full-time missionaries and to priesthood and auxiliary leaders throughout the world. I express my gratitude for all these and the thousands of others who are serving in so many capacities, contributing millions of hours in service to their fellowman.

Return the Savior’s love through service

My brothers and sisters, if you have felt stirrings to engage in this work, however quiet those feelings may be, do not procrastinate the day of your service. Now is the time to prepare; now is the time to be called, the time to sacrifice. Now is the time to share your gifts and talents, and now is the time to receive God’s blessings for you and your family. “There is a constant need for more couple missionaries,” President Gordon B. Hinckley has said.¹⁶ As this work rolls forward, that need is increasing. Let us, in our richest years of experience, maturity, wisdom, and most of

all, our faith, rise to meet that need as only we can.

We, above all, have special reason to do so. From our life's experience we can look back and recognize the goodness of our Father in Heaven and His Son, Jesus Christ, to us and our families. As one faithful brother explained, "My wife and I would like to serve five missions—one for each of the beautiful children God has blessed us with!" Whatever blessings we have received individually, I testify that we have all received the greatest blessing of all: "God [our Heavenly Father] so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son,"¹⁷ and His Son, Jesus Christ, "loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life."¹⁸ I bear my special witness that His atoning sacrifice is the ultimate expression of that love.

As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, it is our greatest privilege to return His love through sacrifice and service and claim His holy promise: "And whoso layeth down his life in my cause, for my name's sake, shall find it again, even life eternal."¹⁹ That we may do so is my heartfelt prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 2001, 31; or *Ensign*, May 2001, 25.
2. In Conference Report, Apr. 2001, 31; or *Ensign*, May 2001, 25.
3. Alma 30:8.
4. Moses 6:33.
5. Ether 12:12; italics added.
6. Mosiah 8:18.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 1:21, 23.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 118:3.
9. See Doctrine and Covenants 31:1–2, 5.
10. "I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go," *Hymns*, no. 270.
11. John 12:26.
12. Matthew 6:32; 3 Nephi 13:32.
13. "Called to Serve," *Hymns*, no. 249.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 81:4.
15. Jude 1:22.
16. "To the Bishops of the Church," *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, June 19, 2004, 27.
17. John 3:16.
18. 2 Nephi 26:24.
19. Doctrine and Covenants 98:13.

The choir sang "Come, Come, Ye Saints."

Elder W. Rolfe Kerr offered the benediction.

GENERAL PRIESTHOOD SESSION

The general priesthood session, the third session of the 175th Annual General Conference, convened in the Conference Center at 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, April 2, 2005. President Thomas S. Monson conducted this session.

Music was provided by a priesthood choir from Brigham Young University. Ronald J. Staheli directed the choir, and Clay Christiansen was the organist.

President Monson opened the meeting with the following remarks.

President Thomas S. Monson

We welcome you, brethren, to this general priesthood session of the 175th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Monson, conduct this session.

These services are being relayed by satellite transmission to holders of the priesthood gathered in the Assembly Hall,

the BYU Marriott Center, the Provo Missionary Training Center, and in locations in many countries throughout the world.

The singing during this session will be furnished by a priesthood choir from Brigham Young University, under the direction of Ronald J. Staheli, with Clay Christensen at the organ.

We shall begin this priesthood session with the choir singing “Guide Us, O Thou Great Jehovah.” The invocation will then be offered by Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Presidency of the Seventy.

The choir sang “Guide Us, O Thou Great Jehovah.”

Elder D. Todd Christofferson offered the invocation.

President Monson

The choir will now sing “An Angel from on High.” At the conclusion of the singing, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will address us. He will be followed by Elder Neil L. Andersen of the Seventy, after which we shall hear from Elder Robert C. Oaks of the Presidency of the Seventy.

The choir sang “An Angel from on High.”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

Our most distinguishing feature

Nearly 70 years ago President David O. McKay, then serving as a counselor in the First Presidency of the Church, asked this question to a congregation gathered for general conference:

“If at this moment each one [of you] were asked to state in one sentence . . . the most distinguishing feature of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, what would be your answer?”

“My answer,” he replied, “would be . . . divine authority by direct revelation.”¹

That divine authority is, of course, the holy priesthood.

President Gordon B. Hinckley added his testimony when he said: “[The priesthood] is a delegation of divine authority, different from all other powers and authorities on the face of the earth. . . . It is the only power on the earth that reaches beyond the veil of death.” “Without it there could be a church in name only, [a church] lacking authority to administer in the things of God.”²

Just four weeks ago President James E. Faust said to BYU students in their devotional: “[The priesthood] activates and governs all activities of the Church. Without priesthood keys and authority, there would be no church.”³

Priesthood is indispensable and unique

I begin tonight with these three brief citations (to which scores of others could be added) to stress emphatically just one point: that the priesthood of God, with its keys, its ordinances, its divine origin and ability to bind in heaven what is bound on earth, is as *indispensable* to the true Church of God as it is *unique* to it and that without it there would be no Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In this commemorative year in which we are celebrating the 200th anniversary of the birth of the Prophet Joseph Smith and the 175th year since the organization of the Church, I wish to add my testimony of—and express my eternal gratitude for—the restoration of the holy priesthood,

this hallowed prerogative, this sovereign gift, and the role it plays in our lives on both sides of the veil.

Loss and restoration of the priesthood

The essential function of the priesthood in linking time and eternity was made explicit by the Savior when He formed His Church during His mortal ministry. To His senior Apostle Peter, He said, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."⁴ Six days later He took Peter, James, and John to a mountaintop where He was transfigured in glory before them. Then prophets from earlier dispensations, including at least Moses and Elijah,⁵ appeared in glory also and conferred the various keys and powers that each held.

Unfortunately those Apostles were soon killed or otherwise taken from the earth, and their priesthood keys were taken with them, resulting in more than 1,400 years of priesthood privation and absence of divine authority among the children of men. But part of the modern miracle and marvelous history we celebrate tonight is the return of those same heavenly messengers in our day and the restoration of those same powers they held for the blessing of all mankind.

In May of 1829 while translating the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith came across a reference to baptism. He discussed the matter with his scribe, Oliver Cowdery, and the two earnestly supplicated the Lord regarding the matter. Oliver wrote: "Our souls were drawn out in mighty prayer, to know how we might obtain the blessings of baptism and of the Holy Spirit. . . . *We diligently sought for . . . the authority of the holy priesthood, and the power to administer in the same.*"⁶

In response to that "mighty prayer," John the Baptist came, restoring the keys and powers of the Aaronic Priesthood,

which our young men in this audience tonight have been given. A few weeks later, Peter, James, and John returned to restore the keys and powers of the Melchizedek Priesthood, including the keys of the apostleship. Then when a temple had been built to which other heavenly messengers might come, there unfolded on April 3, 1836, a modern-day equivalent of that earlier Mount of Transfiguration, part of something President Hinckley once called the "Kirtland cascade" of revelation in which the Savior Himself, plus Moses, Elijah, and Elias, appeared in glory to the Prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and conferred keys and powers from their respective dispensations upon these men. That visit was then concluded with this thunderous declaration: "Therefore, the keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands."⁷

An unbroken chain of priesthood authority

Little wonder that the Prophet Joseph would include in those succinct and eloquent articles of our faith, "We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and *by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority*, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof."⁸ Clearly, acting with divine authority requires more than mere social contract. It cannot be generated by theological training or a commission from the congregation. No, in the authorized work of God there has to be power greater than that already possessed by the people in the pews or in the streets or in the seminaries—a fact that many honest religious seekers had known and openly acknowledged for generations leading up to the Restoration.

It is true that some few in that day did not want their ministers to claim special sacramental authority, but most people longed for priesthood sanctioned by God and were frustrated as to where they might go to find such.⁹ In that spirit the revelatory return of priesthood authority through Jo-

seph Smith should have eased centuries of anguish in those who felt what the famed Charles Wesley had the courage to say. Breaking ecclesiastically with his more famous brother John over the latter's decision to ordain without authority to do so, Charles wrote with a smile:

How easily are bishops made
By man or woman's whim:
Wesley his hands on Coke hath laid,
But who laid hands on him?¹⁰

In responding to that challenging question, we in the restored Church of Jesus Christ can trace the priesthood line of authority exercised by the newest deacon in the ward, the bishop who presides over him, and the prophet who presides over all of us. That line goes back in an unbroken chain to angelic ministers who came from the Son of God Himself, bearing this incomparable gift from heaven.

And, oh, how we need its blessings—as a Church and as individuals and families within the Church. Just one illustration:

The priesthood's capacity to bless

I spoke earlier of the Kirtland period of Church history. The years of 1836 and 1837 were as difficult as that young Church had ever faced—financially, politically, and internally. In the midst of that stress, Joseph Smith had the remarkable prophetic prompting to send some of his ablest men (ultimately the entire Quorum of the Twelve Apostles) abroad on missions. It was a bold, inspired move, one that would in the end save the Church from the perils of the day, but in the near term it imposed great burdens on the Saints—painful for those who went away and perhaps even more painful for those who stayed at home.

I quote from Elder Robert B. Thompson:

“The day appointed for the departure of the Elders to England having arrived, I [stopped at] the house of Brother [Heber C.] Kimball to ascertain when he would

start [on his journey], as I expected to accompany him two or three hundred miles, intending to spend my labors in Canada that season.

“The door being partly open, I entered and felt struck with the sight which presented itself to my view. I would have retired, thinking that I was intruding, but I felt riveted to the spot. The father was pouring out his soul to . . . [God, pleading] that He who ‘careth for sparrows, and feedeth the young ravens when they cry’ would supply the wants of his wife and little ones in his absence. He then, like the patriarchs, and by virtue of his office, laid his hands upon their heads individually, leaving a father’s blessing upon them, . . . commending them to the care and protection of God, while he should be engaged preaching the Gospel in a foreign land. While thus engaged [in giving those blessings] his voice was almost lost in the sobs of those around [him], who [were trying in their youthful way to be strong but having a very hard time doing so.] . . . He proceeded, but his heart was too much affected to do so regularly. . . . He was obliged to stop at intervals, while . . . big tears rolled down his cheeks, an index to the feelings which reigned in his bosom. My heart was not stout enough to refrain,” said Brother Thompson. “In spite of myself I wept, and mingled my tears with theirs. At the same time I felt thankful that I had the privilege of contemplating such a scene.”¹¹

That scene has been reenacted one way or another a thousand times, a hundred thousand times, in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—a fear, a need, a call, a danger, a sickness, an accident, a death. I have been a participant in such moments. I have beheld the power of God manifest in my home and in my ministry. I have seen evil rebuked and the elements controlled. I know what it means to have mountains of difficulty move and ominous Red Seas part. I know what it means to have the destroying angel “pass by them.”¹² To have received the authority

and to have exercised the power of “the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God,”¹³ is as great a blessing for me and for my family as I could ever hope for in this world. And that, in the end, is the meaning of the priesthood in everyday terms—its unequaled, unending, constant capacity to bless.

Praise to the man

With gratitude for such blessings, I join you and a choir of the living and the dead in singing in this commemorative year, “Praise to the man who communed with Jehovah!”¹⁴—and communed with Adam; Gabriel; Moses and Moroni; Elijah; Elias; Peter, James, and John; John the Baptist; and a host of others.¹⁵ Truly “Jesus anointed that Prophet and Seer.”¹⁶ May we, young and old, boys and men, fathers and sons, cherish the priesthood that through him was restored, priesthood keys and ordinances by which alone the power of godliness is manifest and without which it cannot be manifest.¹⁷ I testify of the restoration of the priesthood and the indispensable “distinguishing feature” of the true Church of God that it has always been, in the name of Him whose priesthood it is, even the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1937, 121.

2. “Priesthood Restoration,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1988, 71.
3. “Where Is the Church?” devotional address, Brigham Young University, Mar. 1, 2005, 8.
4. Matthew 16:19.
5. See Matthew 17:1–3.
6. Quoted in Richard Lloyd Anderson, “The Second Witness of Priesthood Restoration,” *Improvement Era*, Sept. 1968, 20; italics added.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 110:16; see also verses 1–15.
8. Articles of Faith 1:5; italics added.
9. See David F. Holland, “Priest, Pastor, Power,” *Insight*, fall 1997, 15–22 for a thorough examination of priesthood issues current in America at the time of the Restoration.
10. Quoted in C. Beaufort Moss, *The Divisions of Christendom: A Retrospect* (n.d.), 22.
11. Quoted in Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (1945), 108–9.
12. Doctrine and Covenants 89:21.
13. See Doctrine and Covenants 107:1–3.
14. “Praise to the Man,” *Hymns*, no. 27.
15. Joseph Smith had communion with many prophets and messengers from beyond the veil. For just a few of those mentioned in scripture, see Doctrine and Covenants 128:20–21.
16. *Hymns*, no. 27.
17. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–21.

Elder Neil L. Andersen

Beware of the evil behind the smiling eyes

Tonight I speak to you young men, you whom President Gordon B. Hinckley has described as “the finest generation.”¹ Across the world we see your goodness. I pray that you will feel that my words are personally for you, a son of God, working hard to do what’s right.

I’d like to tell you of an experience of a faithful Latter-day Saint who is a good

friend of mine. I’ll refer to him only as “my friend” for reasons you will understand.

Working as a special agent for the FBI, my friend investigated organized crime groups transporting illegal drugs into the United States. On one occasion he and another agent approached an apartment where they believed a known drug dealer was distributing cocaine. My friend describes what happened:

"We knocked on the door of the drug dealer. The suspect opened the door and, upon seeing us, tried to block our view. But it was too late; we could see the cocaine on his table.

"A man and a woman who were at the table immediately began removing the cocaine. We had to prevent them from destroying the evidence, so I quickly pushed the drug suspect who was blocking the door to the side. As I pushed him, my eyes met his. Strangely, he did not appear angry or afraid. He was smiling at me.

"His eyes and disarming smile gave me the impression that he was harmless, so I quickly left him and started to move toward the table. The suspect was now behind me. At that instant, I had the distinct, powerful impression come into my mind: 'Beware of the evil behind the smiling eyes.'

"I immediately turned back toward the suspect. His hand was in his large front pocket. Instinctively I grabbed his hand and pulled it from his pocket. Only then did I see, clutched in his hand, the semi-automatic pistol ready to fire. A flurry of activity followed, and I disarmed the man."²

Later, in another case, the drug dealer was convicted of murder and boasted that he would have also killed my friend had he not turned around at that very moment.

I have often thought of the communication that came into his mind: "Beware of the evil behind the smiling eyes." This is what I want to talk to you about tonight.

We are here to choose good over evil

Let's begin with what we know. Good comes from God; evil comes from the devil.³ They are not, however, equal forces that are fighting each other in the universe. At the head of all that is good is the Christ—He who is the Only Begotten of the Father, who created our world and numerous others. Our Redeemer is a resurrected and perfect being.⁴ I know He lives.

The devil, on the other hand, "persuadeth men to do evil."⁵ "He [has] fallen from heaven, . . . [has] become miserable forever,"⁶ and now works "that all men might be miserable like unto himself."⁷ He is a liar and a loser.⁸

The power of the Savior and the power of the devil are not truly comparable. It would be like comparing the greatest army on earth to a runaway band of two-year-olds in the nursery armed with water pistols.⁹

On this planet, however, evil has been allowed a position of influence to give us the chance to choose between good and evil. The scripture says: "God gave unto man that he should act for himself. [And] man could not act for himself [unless] he was enticed by . . . one or the other."¹⁰

The choice between good and evil is at the very heart of our experience on earth. In the final review of our lives, it will not really matter if we were rich or poor, if we were athletic or not, if we had friends or were often forgotten.

We can work, study, laugh and have fun, dance, sing, and enjoy many different experiences. These are a wonderful part of life, but they are not central to why we are here.¹¹ The opportunity to choose good over evil is precisely why we are here.¹²

The choice is not always easy

Not one of us would say, "I want to choose evil." We all want to choose the right. However, the choice of good over evil is not always easy because evil frequently lurks behind smiling eyes. Listen to these warnings:

"Take heed . . . that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God."¹³

"Ye must watch and pray always lest ye enter into temptation; for Satan desireth to have you."¹⁴

"Satan hath sought to deceive you, that he might overthrow you."¹⁵

The message is: Beware of the evil behind the smiling eyes!

I have known a few young men who began with every intention to stay firm in their loyalty to the Savior, but who slipped from the path because they did not see the evil behind eyes that appeared quite harmless. They saw the fun, the pleasure, the acceptance, but they did not see the other consequences.

How to discern evil

How, then, can we discern the evil behind something that doesn't appear evil?

You already know the answers, but here are a few thoughts:

First, talk to your parents. Does that sound like a revolutionary idea? We fathers know we are far from perfect, but we love you, and along with your mothers we have a deep interest in your choosing the right.

Next, follow the prophet. These 15 men we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators are given divine power to see what we sometimes do not see. President Hinckley has given us clear and specific counsel about the evil behind the smiling eyes.¹⁶ And you have the inspired guidance in the booklet *For the Strength of Youth*.¹⁷ As you apply President Hinckley's counsel, the Lord has promised that He "will disperse the powers of darkness from before you."¹⁸ You will see the evil behind the smiling eyes, and its appeal will leave you.

Very importantly, let the Holy Ghost be your guide. The Lord has promised us that as we live righteously, the still, small voice will come into our minds and into our hearts.¹⁹ You have felt this influence. You know this voice.²⁰

The gift of the Holy Ghost is a spiritual gift. It is sensitive and will not be associated with unworthiness. You cannot offend or ignore it one day and expect it to strengthen you the next day. But as you heed its promptings and remain righteous,

it will grow stronger within you. The Holy Ghost warned my friend of physical danger; the Holy Ghost will also warn you of spiritual danger.

Finally, gain your own testimony of the Savior. Pray passionately. Read the Book of Mormon when no one is watching. Take time alone to think about who Jesus really is and how His life and sacrifice are important to you.

Remember the example of the young Joseph Smith. When he lit the candle at night to read the Bible, it was because he wanted to. When he went into the grove to pray, he went alone.²¹

As we increase our understanding and love for the Savior, His light will illuminate everything around us. We then will see evil for what it is.²²

I know that Jesus Christ is our Savior. Words cannot describe His greatness and glory, His majesty and magnificence. He appeared with His Father to the Prophet Joseph Smith. President Gordon B. Hinckley is the prophet of God today. Brethren, we hold His holy priesthood. As we remain worthy, we will be blessed to see the evil behind the smiling eyes. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1992, 96; or *Ensign*, May 1992, 69.
2. Personal correspondence, Mar. 7, 2005.
3. See Moroni 7:12.
4. See Luke 24:36–39; John 1:14; 3 Nephi 12:48; Doctrine and Covenants 76:23–24.
5. Moroni 7:17.
6. 2 Nephi 2:18.
7. 2 Nephi 2:27.
8. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:25; see also Bible Dictionary, "Devil," 656.
9. See Moses 1:1–22.
10. 2 Nephi 2:16.
11. See Gordon B. Hinckley, "A Prophet's Counsel and Prayer for Youth," *Ensign*, Jan. 2001, 2–11; Conference Report, Apr. 1997, 66–71; or *Ensign*, May 1997,

- 47–50; Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 66–70; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 49–51.
12. See 2 Nephi 2:27.
13. See Moroni 7:14.
14. 3 Nephi 18:18.
15. Doctrine and Covenants 50:3.
16. See *Ensign*, Jan. 2001, 2–11.
17. See www.lds.org. Click on “Serving in the Church,” “Aaronic Priesthood / Young Men,” “For the Strength of Youth.”
18. Doctrine and Covenants 21:6.
19. See Doctrine and Covenants 8:2.
20. See Doctrine and Covenants 18:36.
21. See Joseph Smith—History 1:11–20.
22. See Moses 1:1–22.

Elder Robert C. Oaks

Who’s on the Lord’s side?

This evening I would like to focus my comments on a favorite hymn’s rousing call to service: “Who’s on the Lord’s side? Who? / Now is the time to show” (“Who’s on the Lord’s Side?” *Hymns*, no. 260).

In this, the dispensation of the fulness of time, as we prepare for the final satanic battles in anticipation of the return of Christ to the earth, it is very important to know who is on the Lord’s side. The Lord needs to know on whom He can rely.

You would hope that every priesthood holder could be counted on to show up for service in the ranks of the Lord’s army. Today in the Church there are about three million priesthood holders, split evenly between the Aaronic and the Melchizedek Priesthoods.

Unfortunately, far too many of these men, young and not so young, are missing, absent without leave, AWOL.

One day they each sat humbly while men of authority laid hands upon their heads and conferred the priesthood upon them. That day they all made a covenant of obedience and service with the Lord.

Authority of the Aaronic Priesthood

To understand the importance of these covenants, we need to ask ourselves, “What is the priesthood?” Every alert deacon knows the answer to this question: the priesthood is the power to act in God’s name.

What does this mean to you deacons, teachers, and priests? First, it means you are authorized to pass, prepare, and bless the sacrament. Is this a big deal? Absolutely!

Who administered the first sacrament service that we have any record of? Of course the answer is the Lord Jesus Christ. The evening before His suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ prepared, blessed, and passed the sacrament to His disciples. So when we perform this sacred ordinance, we are actually standing in for the Savior Himself. That is special!

John the Baptist laid his hands on the heads of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and conferred upon them the priesthood of Aaron and declared, “I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins” (D&C 13:1). That is a significant responsibility for men of any age. With that charge, we are clearly on the Lord’s side.

Authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood

What of the Melchizedek Priesthood? The 84th section of the Doctrine and Covenants reads, “And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God” (v. 19). This priesthood holds the power to administer and lead, to bless and heal, to teach

and seal. These priesthood service activities clearly place the practicing brethren on the Lord's side.

One of the greatest examples of priesthood sealing power is the story of Nephi, son of Helaman. Because of his diligence in declaring the word of God, the Lord gave him sealing power that "whatsoever ye shall seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Helaman 10:7). Nephi would have been a mighty leader in the Lord's army in any dispensation.

What a great act of trust it is on the part of our Father in Heaven to share with us a part of His power, that we might assist Him in His grand work as it rolls forth to fill the earth.

Conferral of priesthood authority

Note how carefully we have been instructed on how to confer priesthood authority. When I turned 12 years old, my father, Charles Oaks, and my bishop, George Collard, laid their hands on my head and conferred upon me the Aaronic Priesthood and ordained me a deacon.

Several years later, then Elder Gordon B. Hinckley used this same heavenly directed procedure to ordain me a Seventy. Each ordination reflects additional divine trust and a new opportunity to serve on the Lord's side.

The battle for souls

When armies are formed, battles are generally fought on vast battlefields. But this battle for souls is quite different. The conflict goes on each day in individual lives and pits the Lord's troops against Satan's forces of greed, selfishness, and lust.

The muscular young men of Helaman's 2,060 stripling warriors, shoulder to shoulder, imply the need for great physical strength to join their ranks. But there is room for every stout-hearted soul in this endeavor.

Weapons of eternal worth

We have an 11-year-old grandson, Andrew, who is confined to a wheelchair, maybe for the rest of his life. He will be ordained a deacon in the fall and will join the priesthood army of the Lord. His physical handicap will not limit him in this war, because the weapons of choice are not spears and swords wielded on a chaotic field of battle.

Rather, the weapons of eternal worth reflecting the whole armor of God are *truth*, *righteousness*, *faith*, *prayer*, and the *word of God* (see Ephesians 6:13–18). These weapons are wielded in our minds, mouths, and movements. Every righteous thought, word, and deed is a victory for the Lord.

That is why Andrew has no handicap in this battle. His parents have taught him well. He stands ready to join the ranks of the priesthood brethren.

The stakes are extremely high. The prizes are the very souls of the sons and daughters of God—their eternal salvation. And these souls will be won or lost on the basis of virtue and cleanliness, on the basis of charity and service, and on the basis of faith and hope.

Take care of your wingman

Andrew will join the deacons quorum in his home ward. They will teach him to pass the sacrament and to collect fast offerings. They will look after him, because that is what priesthood quorums are all about—caring for one another. In fact, that is how the Lord's priesthood army is organized—into quorums.

I spent a majority of my life as a pilot in the United States Air Force. The men of my squadron remain, to this day, a tight-knit group, keeping in close touch after 40 years.

In our training as fighter pilots, one of the first and most basic rules was, "Take care of your wingman. Constantly check

his six o'clock to make certain no enemy is sneaking up behind him."

If it is good advice to protect comrades in a fighter squadron, it is great advice to stay close to and protect our quorum members as we strive to stand firm on the Lord's side. We should be eager to go out and find them when they stray.

The end is drawing near

Standing firm on the Lord's side is especially valuable today. Our prophet regularly points out that these are the last days. We know from the signs of the times that the end is drawing near. And Satan knows it as well. He and his forces never seem to sleep.

In a worldwide priesthood leadership training meeting, President Hinckley, noting the immoral conditions in the world, stated, "I do not know that things were worse in the times of Sodom and Gomorrah."

He went on to say: "They and their wicked inhabitants were annihilated. We see similar conditions today. They prevail all across the world. I think our Father must weep as He looks down upon His wayward sons and daughters" ("Standing Strong and Immoveable," *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Jan. 10, 2004, 20).

I do not know how much more our prophet has to say for us to consider ourselves warned.

Prepare temporally and spiritually

In a recent conference talk, Elder Dallen H. Oaks stated: "These signs of the Second Coming are all around us and seem to be increasing in frequency and intensity. . . . While we are powerless to alter the fact of the Second Coming and unable to know its exact time, we can accelerate our own preparation and try to influence the preparation of those around us. . . . We need to make both temporal and spiritual preparation for the events prophesied at the

time of the Second Coming" (in Conference Report, Apr. 2004, 5-7; or *Ensign*, May 2004, 7-9).

And these statements of warning came well before a season of unprecedented hurricane destruction in the Caribbean area and the tsunami devastation in East Asia.

Now is the time

Our hymn "Who's on the Lord's Side?" instructs us, "Now is the time to show." Now is the time to stand fast in our faith and on our principles, as did Captain Moroni. We are needed *now*, deacons, teachers, priests, bishops, elders, high priests, and patriarchs. Now is the time to show our appreciation for the atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now is the time to show our faith through our obedience to such basic commandments as the laws of chastity and tithing, the Word of Wisdom, and keeping the Sabbath day holy.

Now is the time to warn our neighbors by sharing the gospel message with them. Now is the time to provide the world with an example of decency and modesty, an example of virtue and cleanliness. We should never squander our priesthood power, wallowing in the corruptive, corrosive filth and slime of pornography.

Now is the time to review the covenants we have made with the Lord at the waters of baptism, covenants we made when we accepted the oath and covenant of the priesthood, and covenants we have made in His holy temples.

Now is indeed the time to show we are on the Lord's side.

Brethren, this is His work. The gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored in its fullness in these last days through the Prophet Joseph Smith. Christ stands at the head of this Church, leading it forward through His living prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley. Christ will return to the earth to rule and reign, and we will each, one day, stand before Him to be judged on our thoughts, our deeds, and the desires of our hearts.

He is our Savior and our Redeemer, and I so testify in His holy name, amen.

President Monson

We will now be pleased to hear from President James E. Faust, Second Coun-

selor in the First Presidency. The choir and congregation will then sing “High on the Mountain Top.” Following the singing, it will be my privilege to address you.

President James E. Faust

I wish to welcome those Brethren who were called and sustained this afternoon to be members of the First and Second Quorums of the Seventy. Each one is a man of faith and ability and commitment, and we certify to you that they are worthy in all respects to hold these offices.

My dear brethren of the great worldwide brotherhood of the priesthood, we commend you for your faithfulness and your dedication to the work of the Lord. We thank you for your commitment and your devoted service. You contribute much to the strength of the Church.

Lessons learned from serving a mission

It is wonderful to be in this meeting with all of you who hold the Aaronic Priesthood. When I was your age, I used to wonder, “What will be my place in this world, and how will I find it?” At that time, about my only firm goal was to serve a mission. When my mission call came, I served, and my mission became like the North Star to guide me into the other pursuits of my life. One of the important things I learned was that if I faithfully persevered in my Church callings, the Lord would open up the way and guide me to other opportunities and blessings, even beyond my dreams.

Serving a mission can do this for all you young men. A young man recently shared with me how much he had learned from his perseverance as a missionary. I draw from his experience some of the

things you can learn that would bring opportunities and blessings to you:

1. How to organize and use time wisely
2. The importance of hard work—that you reap what you sow
3. Leadership skills
4. People skills
5. The value of gospel study
6. Respect for authority
7. The importance of prayer
8. Humility and dependence on the Lord¹

Persevere to achieve your potential

When I went to Granite High School in Salt Lake City in the 1930s, I had some friends who excelled in athletics, drama, music, and speech. Some of them went on to achieve success in life, but too many of those gifted and able young people did not persevere and failed to achieve their potential. In contrast, several less visible young men and women at the same school worked diligently, persevered, and continued with their education and became outstanding doctors, engineers, educators, lawyers, scientists, businessmen, artisans, electricians, plumbers, and entrepreneurs.

Success is usually earned by persevering and not becoming discouraged when we encounter challenges. Paul Harvey, the famous news analyst and author, once said:

“Someday I hope to enjoy enough of what the world calls success so that someone will ask me, ‘What’s the secret of it?’ I shall say simply this: ‘I get up when I fall down.’”²

Madame Curie's example of perseverance

An outstanding example of perseverance is Madame Marie Curie, who worked together with her French physicist husband, Pierre Curie, "in an old abandoned leaky shed without funds and without outside encouragement or help, trying to isolate radium from a low-grade uranium ore called pitchblende. And after their 487th experiment had failed, Pierre threw up his hands in despair and said, 'It will never be done. Maybe in a hundred years, but never in my day.' Marie confronted him with a resolute face and said, 'If it takes a hundred years, it will be a pity, but I will not cease to work for it as long as I live.'"³ She was eventually successful, and cancer patients have benefited greatly from her perseverance.

Perseverance saves Lorenzo Snow's life

Perseverance is demonstrated by those who keep going when the going gets tough, who don't give up even when others say, "It can't be done." In 1864 the First Presidency assigned Apostles Ezra T. Benson and Lorenzo Snow, along with Elders Alma Smith and William W. Cluff, on a mission to the Hawaiian Islands. From Honolulu they took passage on a small boat to the little harbor of Lahaina. As they approached the reef, the surf was running high and a heavy swell struck the boat, carrying it about 50 yards and leaving it in a trough between two huge waves. When the second swell struck, the boat capized into the foaming sea.

The people on the shore manned a lifeboat and picked up three of the brethren, who were swimming near the submerged boat. But there was no sign of Brother Snow. Hawaiians accustomed to the surf swam in every direction to search for him. Eventually one of them felt something in the water, and they pulled Brother Snow to the surface. His body was stiff,

and he looked like he was dead as they hauled him into the boat.

Elder Smith and Elder Cluff laid Brother Snow's body across their laps and quietly administered to him, asking the Lord to spare his life that he might return to his family and home. When they reached the shore, they carried Brother Snow to some large empty barrels lying on the beach. Laying him face downward on one of them, they rolled him back and forth to expel the water he had swallowed.

After the elders worked over him for some time, without any indication of life, the bystanders said that nothing more could be done for him. But the determined elders would not give up. So they prayed again, with the quiet assurance that the Lord would hear and answer their prayers.

They were impressed to do something rather unusual for that day and time. One of them placed his mouth over Brother Snow's in an effort to inflate his lungs, alternately blowing in and drawing out air, imitating the natural process of breathing. Taking turns, they persevered until they succeeded in inflating his lungs. A little while later they perceived faint indications of returning life. "A slight wink of the eye, which, until then, had been open and death-like, and a very faint rattle in the throat, were the first symptoms of returning vitality. These grew more and more distinct, until consciousness was fully restored." With their perseverance and the smile of merciful Providence, all four of the Lord's servants survived and were able to complete their missions.⁴

Elder Snow went on to become the President of the Church. While serving in that office, he stabilized the Church's funds by urging the members to pay their tithes and offerings.

You brethren will be interested to know that the Alma Smith in this story was the boy who was shot in the hip at Haun's Mill, destroying the hip joint and socket. His mother dressed the terrible wound

with some balsam and then was inspired to have him lie on his face for five weeks. A flexible gristle grew in place of the missing joint and socket so that he was able not only to live a normal life, but also to serve a mission to Hawaii and give a lifetime of service to the Church.⁵

Perseverance of latter-day prophets

Our latter-day prophets are all examples of determination through priesthood, prayer, and work. Joseph Smith's perseverance made possible the Restoration of all things. All of his life he was treated with contempt and ridicule—from the time he first related the account of the First Vision to a preacher of a prominent religion. But he never faltered, and he left with us his unwavering testimony:

“I had actually seen a light, and in the midst of that light I saw two Personages, and they did in reality speak to me; and though I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision, yet it was true; . . . I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it.”⁶

Brigham Young's life was the very essence of perseverance. He was always faithful and resolute. After Joseph Smith's death, he had the bold determination to bring 60,000 people from the comfort of their homes and productive lands to a barren wilderness. This great exodus was unlike any other in modern history. They came in wagons, on foot, and pulling handcarts. He and his followers made the desert blossom as a rose.

At the first press conference when President Gordon B. Hinckley was introduced to the press as the President of the Church in 1995, he was asked what his focus would be. He answered: “Carry on. Yes. Our theme will be to carry on the great work which has been furthered by our predecessors.”⁷ This is a great theme for all of us. We need to carry on and endure to the end.

One of the great accomplishments of President Hinckley's administration has been his extraordinary perseverance in building temples. Since he became the President of the Church, 87 temples have been dedicated, rededicated, or announced. This remarkable achievement in temple building is unequaled in the entire history of the world. Temples have a great effect for good and are increasingly blessing the world. As President George Q. Cannon said:

“Every foundation stone that is laid for a Temple, and every Temple completed according to the order the Lord has revealed for his holy Priesthood, lessens the power of Satan on the earth, and increases the power of God and Godliness, moves the heavens in mighty power in our behalf, invokes and calls down upon us the blessings of the Eternal Gods, and those who reside in their presence.”⁸

Serve faithfully to the end

Each of us should serve faithfully and diligently in our priesthood callings until the end of our days. Some might wonder, “How long do I have to be a home teacher?” My answer is that home teaching is a priesthood calling. To serve in the calling of a home teacher is a privilege as long as our bishop and priesthood leaders feel we are able to do so. Some of us knew Brother George L. Nelson, a prominent attorney in Salt Lake City who served as a bishop, stake president, and patriarch. He was completely committed to the Church. He was a home teacher at age 100. He said at that time, “I like being a home teacher. I hope I can always be a home teacher.”⁹ He died at age 101 and was faithful to the end.

Those who desire to be baptized into the Church are required by the Lord to have “a determination to serve him to the end.”¹⁰ President Joseph Fielding Smith, at age 94, said, “I have sought all my days to magnify my calling in that priesthood and

hope to endure to the end in this life and to enjoy the fellowship of the faithful saints in the life to come.”¹¹ As the Lord said, if we are to be His disciples, we must continue in His word.”¹² The Lord has blessed the Church and its members in remarkable ways because of their faithfulness and perseverance. I testify of the divinity of the holy work of the priesthood and do so in the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Dan Kartchner, personal communication.
2. In Marvin J. Ashton, in Conference Report, Oct. 1981, 126; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1981, 89.
3. Sterling W. Sill, in Conference Report, Oct. 1974, 86; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1974, 62.
4. See Eliza R. Snow Smith, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow* (1884), 276–81.
5. See “Amanda Smith,” in Andrew Jenson, comp., *Historical Record*, 9 vols. (1882–90), 5:83–88.
6. Joseph Smith—History 1:25.
7. In Jeffrey R. Holland, “President Gordon B. Hinckley: Stalwart and Brave He Stands,” *Ensign*, June 1995, 2.
8. “The Logan Temple,” *Millennial Star*, Nov. 12, 1877, 743.
9. In Elinor G. Hyde, “At 100 Years Old, He’s Faithful Home Teacher,” *Church News*, June 6, 1998, 7.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 20:37.
11. In Conference Report, Oct. 1970, 92; or *Improvement Era*, Dec. 1970, 27.
12. See John 8:31.

The choir and congregation sang
“High on the Mountain Top.”

President Thomas S. Monson

I too wish to express my welcome to those who have been called to new assignments at this conference and my hearty congratulations to those who have received honorable releases from their service. The work moves forward. We love each of you.

The oath and covenant of the priesthood

My dear brethren, I am honored by the privilege to speak to you this evening. What a joy to see this magnificent Conference Center filled to capacity with those both young and old who hold the priesthood of God. To realize that similar throngs are assembled throughout the world brings to me an overwhelming sense of responsibility. I pray that the inspiration of the Lord will guide my thoughts and inspire my words.

President Joseph F. Smith made the following statement concerning the priesthood. Said he: “The Holy Priesthood is

that authority which God has delegated to man, by which he may speak the will of God. . . . It is sacred, and it must be held sacred by the people. It should be honored and respected by them, in whomsoever it is held.”¹

The oath and covenant of the priesthood pertains to all of us. To those who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood, it is a declaration of our requirement to be faithful and obedient to the laws of God and to magnify the callings which come to us. To those who hold the Aaronic Priesthood, it is a pronouncement concerning future duty and responsibility, that they may prepare themselves here and now.

Said President Marion G. Romney, a former member of the First Presidency: “Every bearer of the Melchizedek Priesthood should give diligent and solemn heed to the implications of this oath and covenant which he has received. Failure to observe the obligations imposed by it is sure

to bring disappointment, sorrow, and suffering.”²

Added President Spencer W. Kimball: “One breaks [his] priesthood covenant by transgressing commandments—but also by leaving undone his duties. Accordingly, to break this covenant one needs only to do nothing.”³

Performing your duty

A famed minister observed: “Men will work hard for money. [Men] will work harder for other men. But men will work hardest of all when they are dedicated to a cause. . . . Duty is never worthily performed until it is performed by one who would gladly do more if only he could.”⁴

The performance of one’s duty brings a sense of happiness and peace. Wrote the poet:

I slept and dreamt that life was joy.
I awoke and saw that life was duty.
I acted, and behold—
Duty was joy.⁵

The call of duty can come quietly as we who hold the priesthood respond to the assignments we receive. President George Albert Smith, that modest yet effective leader, declared, “It is your duty first of all to learn what the Lord wants and then by the power and strength of [your] holy Priesthood to [so] magnify your calling in the presence of your fellows . . . that the people will be glad to follow you.”⁶

Magnifying your calling

What does it mean to magnify a calling? It means to build it up in dignity and importance, to make it honorable and commendable in the eyes of all men, to enlarge and strengthen it, to let the light of heaven shine through it to the view of other men.

And how does one magnify a calling? Simply by performing the service that pertains to it. An elder magnifies the ordained calling of an elder by learning what his

duties as an elder are and then by doing them. As with an elder, so with a deacon, a teacher, a priest, a bishop, and each who holds office in the priesthood.

Poet and author Robert Louis Stevenson reminded us, “I know what pleasure is, for I have done good work.”

Brethren, let us remember the counsel of King Benjamin: “When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God.”⁷

Rescuing those who are less active

Let us reach out to rescue those who need our help and lift them to the higher road and the better way. Let us focus our thinking on the needs of priesthood holders and their wives and children who have slipped from the path of activity. May we listen to the unspoken message from their hearts. You will find it to be familiar:

Lead me, guide me, walk beside me,
Help me find the way.
Teach me all that I must do
To live with him someday.⁸

The work of reactivation is no task for the idler or daydreamer. Children grow, parents age, and time waits for no man. Do not postpone a prompting; rather, act on it, and the Lord will open the way.

Frequently the heavenly virtue of patience is required. As a bishop I felt prompted one day to call on a man whose wife was somewhat active, as were the children. This man, however, had never responded. It was a hot summer’s day when I knocked on the screen door of Harold G. Gallacher. I could see Brother Gallacher sitting in his chair reading the newspaper. “Who is it?” he queried, without looking up.

“Your bishop,” I replied. “I’ve come to get acquainted and to urge your attendance with your family at our meetings.”

“No, I’m too busy,” came the disdainful reply. He never looked up. I thanked

him for listening and departed the doorstep.

The Gallacher family moved to California shortly thereafter. Many years went by. Then, as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, I was working in my office one day when my secretary called, saying, "A Brother Gallacher who once lived in your ward is here in the office and would like to talk to you."

I responded, "Ask him if his name is Harold G. Gallacher who, with his family, once lived at Vissing Place on West Temple and Fifth South."

She said, "He is the man."

I asked her to send him in. We had a pleasant conversation together concerning his family. He told me, "I've come to apologize for not getting out of my chair and letting you in the door that summer day long years ago." I asked him if he was active in the Church. With a smile, he replied: "I'm a counselor in my ward bishopric. Your invitation to come out to church, and my negative response, so haunted me that I determined to do something about it."

Harold and I visited together on numerous occasions before he passed away. The Gallachers and their children filled many callings in the Church.

Priesthood is the perfect plan of service

President Stephen L. Richards, who served as a counselor to President David O. McKay, declared, "The Priesthood is usually simply defined as 'the power of God delegated to man.'" He continues: "This definition, I think, is accurate. But for practical purposes I like to define the Priesthood in terms of service, and I frequently call it 'the perfect plan of service.' . . . It is an instrument of service . . . and the man who fails to use it is apt to lose it, for we are plainly told by revelation that he who neglects it 'shall not be counted worthy to stand.'"9

Renovating a widow's home

This past January I had the privilege of witnessing a profound act of service in the life of a woman who had lived in my ward when I served as bishop many years ago. Her name is Adele, and she and her two grown daughters—one of whom is handicapped—have lived for many years in the Rose Park area of the Salt Lake Valley. Adele, who is a widow, has struggled financially, and her life has often been difficult.

I had received a telephone call from an individual involved with the Gingerbread House Project inviting me to the unveiling of Adele's home, the renovation of which had been undertaken during a period of just over three days and nights by many kind and generous individuals, all working voluntarily with materials donated by numerous local businesses. During the time the makeover of her home had been accomplished, Adele and her two daughters had been hosted in a city a number of miles away, where they themselves had received some pampering.

I was present when the limousine bearing Adele and her daughters arrived on the scene. The group which had been waiting for them included not only family and friends but also many of the craftsmen who had worked night and day on the project. It was obvious they were pleased with the result and were anxious to see the reaction of Adele and her daughters.

The women stepped from the car, blindfolds in place. What a thrilling moment it was when the blindfolds were removed and Adele and her daughters turned around and saw their new home. They were absolutely stunned by the magnificent project which had been completed, including a redesign of the front, an extension of the home itself, and a new roof. The outside looked new and immaculate. They could not help but cry.

I accompanied Adele and others as we entered the home and were amazed at what had been accomplished to beautify and enhance the surroundings. The walls had been painted, the floor coverings changed. There were new furnishings, new curtains, new drapes. The cupboards in the kitchen had been replaced; there were new countertops and new appliances. The entire house had been done over from top to bottom, each room spotless and beautiful. Adele and her daughters were literally overcome. However, just as poignant and touching were the expressions on the faces of those who had worked feverishly to make the house new. Tears welled in their eyes as they witnessed the joy they had brought into the lives of Adele and her daughters. Not only had a widow's burden been made lighter, but countless other lives were touched in the process. All were better people for having participated in this effort.

Priesthood holders are agents of the Lord

President Harold B. Lee, one of the great teachers in the Church, gave us this easy-to-understand counsel regarding the priesthood. Said he: "You see, when one becomes a holder of the priesthood, he becomes an agent of the Lord. He should think of his calling as though he were on the Lord's errand."¹⁰

Now, some of you may be shy by nature, perhaps feeling yourselves inadequate to respond affirmatively to a calling. Remember that this work is not yours and mine alone. It is the Lord's work, and when we are on the Lord's errand, brethren, we are entitled to the Lord's help. Remember that the Lord will shape the back to bear the burden placed upon it.

Lessons learned from a visit to Clarkston

While the formal classroom may be intimidating at times, some of the most effective teaching takes place other than in

the chapel or the classroom. Well do I remember that during the spring season some years ago, members of my ward and an adjoining ward took all the Aaronic Priesthood who eagerly looked forward to an annual outing commemorating the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood. On this particular occasion we journeyed by bus 90 miles north to the Clarkston, Utah, cemetery. There, in the quiet of that beautiful setting, we gathered the youth around the grave of Martin Harris, one of the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon. While we surrounded the beautiful granite shaft which marks his grave, Elder Glen L. Rudd, then the bishop of the other ward, presented the background of the life of Martin Harris and read from the Book of Mormon his testimony and that of Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer. The young men listened with rapt attention, realizing they were standing at the grave site of one who had seen an angel and had actually beheld the plates with his own eyes. They reverently touched the granite marker designating the grave and pondered the words they had heard and the feelings they had felt.

Then we walked a short distance to a pioneer grave. The marker bore the name of John P. Malmberg and contained the verse:

A light from our household is gone.
A voice we loved is stilled.
A place is vacant in our hearts
That never can be filled.

We talked with the boys about sacrifice, about dedication to truth. Duty, honor, service, and love—all were taught by that tombstone. In memory's eye I can see the boys reach for their handkerchiefs to wipe away a tear. Heard yet are the sniffles which testified that hearts were touched and commitments made. I believe each youth had determined to be a pioneer—one who goes before, showing others the way to follow.

We then retired as a group to a local park, where all enjoyed a picnic lunch. Before turning homeward, we stopped at the grounds of the beautiful Logan temple. It was a warm day. I invited the boys to stretch out on the spacious lawn and with me gaze at a sky of blue, marked by white, billowy clouds hurried along on their journey by a steady breeze. We admired the beauty of this magnificent pioneer temple. We talked of sacred ordinances and eternal covenants. Lessons were learned. Hearts were touched. Covenants and promises became much more than words. The desire to be worthy to enter temple doors lodged in those youthful hearts. Thoughts turned to the Master; His presence was close. His gentle invitation "Follow me" was somehow heard and felt.

Great shall be their reward

To all who willingly respond to the sacred call of service comes the promise:

"I, the Lord, am merciful and gracious unto those who fear me, and delight to honor those who serve me in righteousness and in truth unto the end.

"Great shall be their reward and eternal shall be their glory."¹¹

My sincere prayer is that all of us may qualify for this divine promise, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, amen.

NOTES

1. *Gospel Doctrine*, 5th ed. (1939), 140.
2. In Conference Report, Mexico City Mexico Area Conference 1972, 73.

3. *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (1982), 497.
4. Harry Emerson Fosdick, in Emerson Roy West, comp., *Vital Quotations* (1968), 38.
5. Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941).
6. In Conference Report, Apr. 1942, 14.
7. Mosiah 2:17.
8. Naomi W. Randall, "I Am a Child of God," *Hymns*, no. 301.
9. In Conference Report, Apr. 1937, 46.
10. In Conference Report, Mexico City Mexico Area Conference 1972, 77.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 76:5–6.

President Monson

We remind you that the Tabernacle Choir broadcast will be from 9:30 to 10:00 tomorrow morning. The Sunday morning session will immediately follow.

Daylight saving time begins tomorrow at 2:00 a.m. We encourage you to move your clocks one hour ahead this evening before retiring.

We express appreciation to the priesthood choir from Brigham Young University for the beautiful music they provided and to all who helped to make this a great priesthood gathering.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet, will be our concluding speaker at this session. Following President Hinckley's remarks, the choir will sing "More Holiness Give Me." The benediction will then be offered by Elder Francisco J. Viñas of the Seventy.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

My dear brethren, we've had a wonderful meeting. I wish to endorse all that has been said and to leave my blessing with you.

First, I'd like to say just a word concerning those we have sustained this after-

noon as members of the Quorums of the Seventy.

I am convinced that there are literally hundreds of brethren worthy and capable to serve as general officers of the Church. We see them everywhere. Those sustained

today have been chosen to fill particular responsibilities. In most cases this will involve sacrifice, which will be willingly made.

Among those sustained, as you have noted, is my 63-year-old son. I make it clear that I did not advance his name. That was done by others whose right it was to do so. I feel extremely sensitive about the matter of nepotism. As the lawyers say, I recused myself from participating. However, I believe he is worthy and qualified in every respect. In the first place, he had a great and wonderful mother. I wish I could recommend his father.

I mention this only because of my sensitivity concerning the matter of nepotism. Please do not hold it against him for his relationship to me. He's powerless to help it.

The growing evil of gambling

Now, to go on to the subject that I wish to discuss tonight. I do so in response to a number of requests that have come to me concerning the position of the Church on a practice that is becoming more common among us, and particularly among our youth. That is the matter of gambling in various forms.

The story is told that one Sunday, Calvin Coolidge, onetime president of the United States and a man noted for few words, returned from church. His wife asked him what the preacher spoke about. He replied, "Sin." "What did he say?" she asked. "He was against it," was his reply.

I think I could answer the question concerning gambling just that briefly. We are against it.

Gambling is to be found almost everywhere and is growing. People play poker. They bet on horse races and dog races. They play roulette and work the slot machines. They gather to play in bars, saloons, and casinos and, all too often, in their own homes. Many cannot leave it alone. It becomes addictive. In so many cases it leads to other destructive habits and practices.

And so very many of those who become involved cannot afford the money it takes. In many cases it robs wives and children of financial security.

Popularity of poker among youth

The game of poker, as it is called, is becoming a college and even a high school craze.

I read to you from a *New York Times* News Service article:

"For Michael Sandberg, it started a few years ago with nickel-and-dime games among friends.

"But last fall, he says, it became the source of a six-figure income and an alternative to law school.

"Sandberg, 22, essentially splits his time between Princeton, where he is a senior and a politics major, and Atlantic City, where he plays high-stakes poker. . . .

"Sandberg's is an extreme example of a gambling revolution on the nation's college campuses. Sandberg calls it an explosion, one spurred by televised poker championships and a proliferation of Web sites that offer online poker games.

"Experts say the evidence of gambling's popularity on campus is hard to miss. In December, for example, a sorority at Columbia University conducted its first, 80-player, poker tournament with a \$10 buy-in, a minimum amount required to play, while the University of North Carolina conducted its first tournament, a 175-player competition, in October. Both games filled up and had waiting lists. At the University of Pennsylvania, private games are advertised every night in a campus e-mail list" (Jonathan Cheng, "Poker Is Major College Craze," in *Deseret Morning News*, Mar. 14, 2005, A2).

The same thing is happening right here in Utah.

A mother writes me as follows:

"My 19-year-old son plays poker on the Internet, and the people on the Internet do not [seem to] care if you are not 21. All

you have to do is have a bank account with money in it. He has been playing steady for almost a year now. He used to have a job, which he quit because he is so addicted to the Internet and poker playing for money right now. He enters poker tournaments all the time, and, if he wins, that is the money that he [uses] to buy the things that he needs. All he does is sit and play on the Internet."

Gambling is creeping up on us

I am told that Utah and Hawaii are now the only two states in the United States that have not legalized lotteries and gambling of various forms. From the letters I have received from members of the Church, it becomes apparent that some of our young people start by playing poker. They get the taste of getting something for nothing and then travel outside of the state to where they can gamble legally.

One writer says in a letter to me: "I can see this evil creeping up in so many lives lately. It is all over the TV. ESPN has something called Celebrity Poker and National Poker Championships."

She continues: "One of our friends invited my husband to sign up for the local poker championship game for a fee. His friend said, 'It's not gambling. Your money just goes into this big pot, and whoever wins gets the pot.'"

Is this gambling? Of course it is. Gambling is simply a process that takes money and does not offer a fair return in goods or services.

Lottery fever leaves most empty-handed

We now have state lotteries on a very large scale. Once the law almost universally prohibited them. Now they are operated as a means of gaining revenue.

Some 20 years ago, speaking in conference, I said:

"Lottery fever recently peaked when New York State announced that three winning tickets would split \$41 million. People

[had] lined up to buy tickets. One winning ticket was held by 21 factory workers, with 778 second-place winners, and 113,000 who received token amounts. That may sound pretty good.

"But there were also 35,998,956 losers, each of whom had paid for a chance to win [and received nothing]" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1985, 67; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1985, 52).

Some American states have imposed heavy taxes on casinos as a source of revenue. The operating company also must have its profit. Then comes the winning ticket holder. All others who bought tickets are left empty-handed.

Most lose in gambling

I am so grateful that when the Lord established this Church, He gave us the law of tithing. I talked at one time with an officer of another church which, I understand, relies on the playing of bingo for a substantial part of its income. I said to this man, "Have you ever considered tithing to finance your church?" He replied, "Yes, and oh, how I wish that we might follow this practice instead of playing bingo. But I do not expect this change in my lifetime."

Casinos have been opened on Indian reservations as a means of securing income for those who own them. A few win, but most lose. They have to if some win and if the house is to make its profit.

One of our young men recently said, "Pay five bucks to see a movie; pay five bucks to play poker—it is the same idea."

It is not the same idea. In one case you get something for which you pay; in the other case, only one picks up the winnings, and the others are left empty-handed.

Experience has shown that the playing of poker can lead to an obsession to gambling.

The Church's opposition to gambling

From the early days of this Church, gambling has been denounced.

As far back as 1842, Joseph Smith described conditions when the Saints lived in Missouri. Said he:

“We made large purchases of land, our farms teemed with plenty, and peace and happiness were enjoyed in our domestic circle, and throughout our neighborhood; but as we could not associate with our neighbors . . . in their midnight revels, their Sabbath breaking, horse racing and gambling; they commenced at first to ridicule, then to persecute, and finally an organized mob assembled and burned our houses, tarred and feathered and whipped many of our brethren, and finally, contrary to law, justice and humanity, drove them from their habitations” (in James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. [1965–75], 1:139).

Brigham Young, in October of 1844, said this concerning Nauvoo: “We wish to suppress all grogshops, gambling houses, and all other disorderly houses or proceedings in our city, and to tolerate no intemperance or vice in our midst” (in *Messages of the First Presidency*, 1:242).

Presidents of the Church and counselors in the Presidency have repeatedly spoken concerning this evil. George Q. Cannon, counselor to three Presidents of the Church, said: “There are many evils in the world which young folks need to be guarded against. One of these is gambling. There are various forms of this evil but they are all bad and should not be indulged in” (*Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of President George Q. Cannon*, sel. Jerreld L. Newquist, 2 vols. [1974], 2:223).

President Joseph F. Smith stated, “The Church does not approve of gambling but strongly condemns it as morally wrong, and classes also with this gambling, games of chance and lottery, of all kinds, and earnestly disapproves of any of its members engaging therein” (“Editor’s Table,” *Improvement Era*, Aug. 1908, 807).

President Heber J. Grant counseled: “The Church has been and now is unalter-

ably opposed to gambling in any form whatever. It is opposed to any game of chance, occupation, or so-called business, which takes money from the person who may be possessed of it without giving value received in return. It is opposed to all practices the tendency of which is to . . . degrade or weaken the high moral standard which the members of the Church, and our community at large, have always maintained” (in *Messages of the First Presidency*, 5:245).

President Spencer W. Kimball said: “From the beginning we have been advised against gambling of every sort. The deterioration and damage comes to the person, whether he wins or loses, to get something for nothing, something without effort, something without paying the full price” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1975, 6; or *Ensign*, May 1975, 6).

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, who is with us tonight, in 1987 delivered a masterful discourse on this subject at what was then Ricks College. It was entitled “Gambling—Morally Wrong and Politically Unwise” (see *Ensign*, June 1987, 69–75).

To these statements of the position of the Church I add my own. The pursuit of a game of chance may seem like harmless fun. But there attaches to it an intensity that actually shows on the faces of those who are playing. And in all too many cases this practice, which appears innocent, can lead to an actual addiction. The Church has been and is now opposed to this practice. If you have never been involved in poker games or other forms of gambling, don’t start. If you are involved, then quit now while you can do so.

Choose wholesome activities instead

There are better ways to spend one’s time. There are better pursuits to occupy one’s interest and energy. There is so much of wonderful reading available. We are not likely to ever get too much of it. There is music to be learned and enjoyed. There is just having a good time together—in danc-

ing, in hiking, in cycling, or in other ways—boys and girls together enjoying one another's company in a wholesome way.

Study praises the youth of the Church

I have been reading a new book, recently published by the Oxford University Press, which has received considerable attention among us. It contains a study conducted by members of the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. It deals with the religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers. Those who conducted the study questioned young people of various faiths and traditions. (See Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* [2005].)

They reached the conclusion that our LDS youth know more about their faith, are more committed to it, and abide more closely by its teachings concerning social behavior than do their peers.

One of the researchers stated, "The LDS Church asks a lot of its teenagers, and . . . more often than not, they get it" (Steve Vaisey, in Elaine Jarvik, "LDS Teens Rank Tops in Living Their Faith," *Deseret Morning News*, Mar. 15, 2005, A3).

Our young people were found to be more likely to hold the same religious beliefs as their parents, to attend religious services once a week, to share their faith with others, to engage in fasting or some other form of self-denial, and to have less doubt about their religious beliefs.

Commentators on the study speak of our youth arising early in the morning to attend seminary. "It is hard to get up so early," one seminary student said. "But

there are blessings that come from doing it. It is a wonderful way to start the day."

The researchers point out that not all of our youth are perfect, but by and large they excel in a most remarkable way. I should add that there is no time to play poker for these high school students.

Do not waste time in an aimless pursuit

My dear young friends to whom I speak tonight, you mean so very much to us. You are so very important. As members of this Church and as holders of the priesthood, you have so great a responsibility. Please, please do not fritter away your time or your talents in an aimless pursuit. If you do so, it will lessen your capacity to do worthwhile things. I believe it will dull your sensitivity to your studies in school. It will disappoint your parents, and as the years pass and you look back, you will be disappointed with yourselves.

The priesthood which you hold as young men carries with it the privilege of the ministering of angels. That companionship, I submit, is incompatible with indulgence in games of chance.

"Choose the right when a choice is placed before you" ("Choose the Right," *Hymns*, no. 239).

May heaven's blessings rest upon you, I humbly pray, as I leave you my testimony of this work and my love for all who are engaged in it, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "More Holiness Give Me."

Elder Francisco J. Viñas offered the benediction.

SUNDAY MORNING SESSION

The fourth session of the 175th Annual General Conference convened in the Conference Center at 10:00 a.m. on Sunday, April 3, 2005. President Gordon B. Hinckley conducted this session.

Music was provided by the Tabernacle Choir. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir, and John Longhurst and Clay Christiansen were the organists. The choir sang “Now Let Us Rejoice” to begin the session. President Hinckley then made the following remarks.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

We welcome you this morning to this, the fourth general session of the 175th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

We extend our greetings to those of you who are participating by radio, television, the Internet, or satellite transmission. We are grateful to the owners and operators of the facilities who are broadcasting this conference.

We acknowledge the presence this morning of government, education, and civic leaders who are here with us.

The music for this session will be by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg, with

John Longhurst and Clay Christiansen at the organ.

The choir opened this session by singing “Now Let Us Rejoice” and will now favor us with “Joseph Smith’s First Prayer.” The invocation will then be offered by Elder Yoshihiko Kikuchi of the Seventy. Following the invocation, the choir will sing “What Was Witnessed in the Heavens?”

The choir sang “Joseph Smith’s First Prayer.”

Elder Yoshihiko Kikuchi offered the invocation.

The choir sang “What Was Witnessed in the Heavens?”

President Hinckley

We will now be pleased to hear from President James E. Faust, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, after which we shall hear from Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He will be followed by Elder David E. Sorensen of the Presidency of the Seventy.

The choir and congregation will then sing “Sweet Is the Work.” At the conclusion of the singing, Sister Kathleen H. Hughes, first counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, will address us.

President James E. Faust

Stand in holy places

My dear brethren, sisters, and friends all over the world, it is a joy and a great responsibility to address you. I express my love, respect, and appreciation for each of you.

We are bombarded on all sides by a vast number of messages we don’t want or need. More information is generated in a single day than we can absorb in a lifetime. To fully enjoy life, all of us must find our

own breathing space and peace of mind.¹ How can we do this? There is only one answer. We must rise above the evil that encroaches upon us. We must follow the counsel of the Lord, who said, “It is my will, that all they who call on my name, and worship me according to mine everlasting gospel, should gather together, and stand in holy places.”²

We unavoidably stand in so many unholy places and are subjected to so much that is vulgar, profane, and destructive of

the Spirit of the Lord that I encourage our Saints all over the world, wherever possible, to strive to stand more often in holy places. Our most holy places are our sacred temples. Within them is a feeling of sacred comfort. We should seek to be worthy to take our families to the temple to be sealed together for eternity. We should also search for the records of our kindred dead so that they too can be sealed to us in one of the temples. We must strive for holiness by being “an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”³ In this way we can maintain and strengthen our own individual relationship with our God.

Becoming holy

Holiness is the strength of the soul. It comes by faith and through obedience to God’s laws and ordinances. God then purifies the heart by faith, and the heart becomes purged from that which is profane and unworthy. When holiness is achieved by conforming to God’s will, one knows intuitively that which is wrong and that which is right before the Lord. Holiness speaks when there is silence, encouraging that which is good or reproving that which is wrong.

Holiness is also a standard of righteousness. In some remarks by President Brigham Young in the Salt Lake Tabernacle on February 16, 1862, he used the expression “Holiness to the Lord.” He then further explained what “Holiness to the Lord” meant to him. I quote: “Thirty years’ experience has taught me that every moment of my life must be holiness to the Lord, resulting from equity, justice, mercy and uprightness in all my actions, which is the only course by which I can preserve the Spirit of the Almighty to myself.”⁴

Leave the world and go to the temple

Last year one of my grandsons took his wife to New York City with their parents to

attend the beautiful new Manhattan temple. The hustle and bustle and noise of the thousands of people outside was deafening. As the taxi pulled up in front of the temple, Katherine, my grandson’s wife, began to cry. Even on the outside of the temple she felt its sacredness. They entered, left the noisome world, and worshiped in the house of the Lord. It was a sacred and unforgettable experience for them.

As President Gordon B. Hinckley taught us, “There is need occasionally to leave the noise and the tumult of the world and step within the walls of a sacred house of God, there to feel His Spirit in an environment of holiness and peace.”⁵ Truly, Joseph Smith’s prayer at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple has been answered: “And that all people who shall enter upon the threshold of the Lord’s house may feel thy power, and feel constrained to acknowledge that . . . it is thy house, a place of thy holiness.”⁶

At the funeral of Patriarch Joseph Smith Sr., his feelings about the temple were described in these words:

“To dwell in the house of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple, was his daily delight; and in it he enjoyed many blessings, and spent many hours in sweet communion with his heavenly Father. He has trod its sacred aisles, solitary and alone from mankind, long before the king of day has gilded the eastern horizon; and he has uttered his aspirations within its walls, when nature has been asleep. In its holy enclosures have the visions of heaven been opened to his mind, and his soul has feasted on the riches of eternity.”⁷

Holiness to the Lord

I am grateful that our temples all bear the words “The House of the Lord, Holiness to the Lord.” This reminder of holy places has roots that go back to the Old Testament. Zechariah reminds us that the day will come when “there [shall] be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO

THE LORD. . . . Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts.”⁸ I greatly admire the door handles in the Salt Lake Temple. They are so artfully designed, each bearing that reminder “Holiness to the Lord.”

As a boy in southern Utah over 65 years ago, I used to feel a thrill when the words “Holiness to the Lord” would appear on some of the buildings in the little towns. Those golden words were often a central adornment for most important buildings, such as the co-op store and the bishops’ storehouse. I have in my possession some stock certificates of ZCMI, a pioneer mercantile institution. They bear the signatures of John Taylor, Brigham Young, Wilford Woodruff, Joseph F. Smith, Lorenzo Snow, Heber J. Grant, George Albert Smith, and David O. McKay. Printed on every stock certificate are the words “Holiness to the Lord.” I wonder what has become of these mottoes of holiness? Have they vanished with so many other reminders of faith and devotion?

Blessings of temple attendance

The days of our lives will be greatly blessed as we frequent the temples to learn the transcending spiritual relations we have with Deity. We need to try harder to be found standing in holy places. Temple ceremonial covenants and observances are means to help secure holiness of character. In our desire to create in our people more commitment to the holy work of the temples, we must urge them to look deeper to the profound spiritual meaning to be found there. As Paul reminded us, “For the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”⁹

In our day President Gordon B. Hinckley has told us: “If every man in this church who has been ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood were to qualify himself to hold a temple recommend, and then were to go to the house of the Lord and renew his covenants in solemnity before God and witnesses, we would be a better people. There

would be little or no infidelity among us. Divorce would almost entirely disappear. So much of heartache and heartbreak would be avoided. There would be a greater measure of peace and love and happiness in our homes. There would be fewer weeping wives and weeping children. There would be a greater measure of appreciation and of mutual respect among us. And I am confident the Lord would smile with greater favor upon us.”¹⁰

The Saints should do their family research and attend the temple because they are moved by the Holy Spirit to do so. We should go to the temple, among other reasons, to safeguard our personal holiness and that of our families.

Homes should be holy places

In addition to temples, surely another holy place on earth ought to be our homes. The feelings of holiness in my home prepared me for feelings of holiness in the temple. Before I went on my first mission to Brazil, my mother lovingly handmade a piece of temple clothing for me to wear when I went to the temple. It is now old and frayed, but it is a special, sacred symbol of Mother’s love for that which is holy.

Thanks to my dear wife, Ruth, I can say that our home has been a place where we have sought to honor the spirit of holiness to the Lord. We did not always succeed. Of course not. But we tried. When I was overwhelmed as a young father with the responsibility of providing temporally for my family, taking care of my Church callings and many other civic duties, Ruth would lovingly and gently bring me back to my parental responsibility in our home.

For example, she would remind me when it was time for home evening and then tenderly suggest what we might appropriately study in our home evenings. She would also help me keep track of important family events such as birthdays and activities of the children when they needed my time and support. She still does

that important and appreciated service. If we really want our homes to be places of holiness, we will try harder to do those things that are conducive to the Spirit of the Lord.

Chapels are holy places

Our chapels are dedicated to the Lord as holy places. We are told we should go to the house of prayer and offer up our sacraments upon His holy day.¹¹ Partaking of the sacrament is a solemn and sacred privilege. In our chapels we are instructed in principles of the gospel, children are blessed, members are confirmed and given the gift of the Holy Ghost, and testimonies of the truthfulness of the gospel are borne. A convert in Texas said, when she walked through the chapel door, there was a feeling of holiness that she had never before experienced in her life.

Strive each day for greater holiness

We must try harder to be a holy people. We live in the fulness of times. So much has been restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. This places upon us a special relationship to the Lord. We are the beneficiaries, guardians, and caretakers of these responsibilities under the delegation, authority, and direction of President Hinckley, who holds all the keys. As children of the Lord, we should strive every day to rise to a higher level of personal righteousness

in all of our actions. We need to guard constantly against all of Satan's influences.

As President Brigham Young taught, "Every moment of [our lives] must be holiness to the Lord, . . . which is the only course by which [we] can preserve the Spirit of the Almighty to [ourselves]." May the Lord bless each and all of us in our special responsibility to find holiness to the Lord by standing in holy places. That is where we will find the spiritual protection we need for ourselves and our families. That is the source of help to carry forth the word of the Lord in our time. Standing in holy places will help us rise above the evil influences of our time and draw us closer to our Savior. I testify that if we do this, the Lord will bless us forever and we will be made mighty "in faith and in works."¹² In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. See Jeff Davidson, "'Overworked Americans' or Overwhelmed Americans?" *Business Horizons*, Jan.-Feb. 1994, 62-66.
2. Doctrine and Covenants 101:22.
3. 1 Timothy 4:12.
4. *Deseret News*, Apr. 2, 1862, 313.
5. "Of Missions, Temples, and Stewardship," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 53.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 109:13.
7. *History of the Church*, 4:194.
8. Zechariah 14:20-21.
9. 2 Corinthians 3:6.
10. *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 53.
11. See Doctrine and Covenants 59:9.
12. Helaman 10:5.

Elder M. Russell Ballard

High standards for missionary service

Brothers and sisters, a few weeks ago Sister Ballard and I enjoyed speaking to the missionaries at the Provo Missionary Training Center. We were thrilled to see their radiant, eager faces and feel the presence of the Spirit of the Lord. These fine

missionaries are well on their way to carrying the message of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. We thank parents, bishops, stake presidents, and especially our young people for responding to the prophet's call for more thorough spiritual preparation to serve the Lord.

As we “raised the bar” for missionary service, President Gordon B. Hinckley said: “This work is rigorous. It demands strength and vitality. It demands mental sharpness and capacity. It demands faith, desire, and consecration. It demands clean hands and a pure heart.”

He went on to say: “The time has come when we must raise the standards of those who are called . . . as ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . We simply cannot permit those who have not qualified themselves as to worthiness to go into the world to speak the glad tidings of the gospel” (“Missionary Service,” *First Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, Jan. 11, 2003, 17).

Today we call for more qualified missionaries, young men who have prepared to serve by accepting the challenge of our prophet “to practice self-discipline, to live above the low standards of the world, to avoid transgression and take the high road in all their activities” (“Missionary Service,” 17).

Prepare every young man

The work of the Lord in our 339 missions is expanding, so we must increase our efforts to see that every 12-year-old young man is worthily ordained a deacon; every 14-year-old, a teacher; every 16-year-old, a priest; and every 18- to 19-year-old worthily receives the Melchizedek Priesthood. We can do this by filling the hearts of our young men with love for the Lord, understanding and appreciation of His Atonement, and a clear vision of the marvel of the Restoration.

When our youth understand the significance of the Restoration of the gospel and know for themselves that God is our Heavenly Father and He loves all of His children, that Jesus is the Christ, and that together They personally visited Joseph Smith to open this, the final dispensation of time, they will want to help carry this message to the world. When our youth see

the Book of Mormon as tangible evidence that the message of the Restoration is true, they will be filled with a desire to do their part in teaching these truths to our Heavenly Father’s children.

We learned from the missionaries at the Missionary Training Center what would have helped them most to prepare for their mission. Above all else they wished they had:

- Learned the doctrine better through focused scripture study.
- Learned how to study and to pray sincerely.
- Been more disciplined and worked harder.
- Understood better what is expected.
- Had more teaching opportunities.
- And had more searching interviews by bishops and parents.

Brothers and sisters, together we can teach the gospel of Jesus Christ, in its simplicity and power, to all of our youth in the Church. Working with parents, we can help them prepare for a mission and a lifetime of service. Let us go forward to search for every one of our precious youth, regardless of their activity level, illuminating the Light of Christ that is within them. President Boyd K. Packer said:

“The Light of Christ is as universal as sunlight itself. Wherever there is human life, there is the Spirit of Christ. Every living soul is possessed of it. . . . It is the inspirer of everything that will bless and benefit mankind. It nourishes goodness itself” (“The Light of Christ,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2005, 13).

So we know that all have within them the Light of Christ. Our responsibility as parents, teachers, and leaders is to kindle that light in our youth until the flame of testimony burns deep within their hearts and souls and then to encourage each one of them to take that flame and use it to help kindle the Light of Christ in others.

Of course, the adversary knows this and is working overtime to influence some of our youth to disregard the teachings of

the Church. That is why parents, leaders, and teachers need to counsel together and know every young man and young woman—every one. Whether they are active or not, we need to know them.

The need for more missionaries

It is true that the bar has been raised for our missionaries. This means that the bar has been raised for parents and leaders as well. We will need to increase our faith and expand our efforts to give every young man the opportunity to serve.

President Hinckley also expressed this concern: “We need more missionaries. The message to raise the bar on missionary qualifications was not a signal to send fewer missionaries but . . . a call for parents and leaders to work with young men earlier to better prepare them for missionary service and to keep them worthy of such service. All young men who are worthy and who are physically and emotionally able should prepare to serve in this most important work” (“To the Bishops of the Church,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, June 19, 2004, 27).

Similarly, with reference to young women, the President said: “There has been some misunderstanding of earlier counsel regarding single sisters serving as missionaries. We need some young women. They perform a remarkable work. They can get in homes where the elders cannot. But it should be kept in mind that young sisters are not under obligation to go on missions. They should not feel that they have a duty comparable to that of young men, but some will wish to go” (“To the Bishops of the Church,” 27).

Brothers and sisters, there is an incredible amount of work that needs to be done. The Spirit of the Lord is brooding over many of the nations of the world. Doors previously locked are opening to us. We need more hardworking, testimony-enriched missionaries in order to reach more of our Heavenly Father’s children who are now at a place where we can reach

them. These are our brothers and sisters, and we have the responsibility to teach them the message of the Restoration.

Blessings of missionary service

We know that great things happen in the lives of those who faithfully serve full-time missions. Missionary service is not easy, but it is infinitely worth it. Those who serve and return home with honor have established a pattern of living and serving that will bless their own lives and the lives of generations to follow. They return better prepared to be strong leaders and teachers in the organizations of the Church. They return better prepared to be righteous fathers and mothers and able to teach their children the gospel. Full-time missionary service is a blessing for those whom the missionaries find and teach as well as for the missionaries themselves.

Find one more young man

Now we have a special request for you bishops and branch presidents. We are aware that you already know those who have cleared the bar and are preparing to accept mission calls during this year. What we are asking leaders in every unit to do is to counsel together with parents and pray to find at least *one more* young man, above those already committed, who can be called to serve.

If the over 26,000 wards and branches in the Church will send all of those whom they are already planning to send into the mission field plus *one more*, the ranks of our full-time missionaries will swell and we will move much closer to our divine mandate to take the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. Of course, these missionaries need to be worthy, faithful, healthy, and fully committed. Perhaps this *one more* may not be ready right now. So we ask parents and stake and ward council members to rely upon the discerning power of the Holy Spirit to know whom you can help to be ready for a call this year.

As you reach out to them, please remember the experience of a friend of mine. He had never owned a horse in his life until he married a wonderful woman who loves horses. Wanting to impress his new bride, he announced one evening that he was going to the pasture to teach a colt how to be led. He weighed more than the colt. He knew more than the colt. He assumed all he would need to do was pull on the lead rope and sooner or later the colt would follow. He was confident that the process would be short and simple.

He attached the lead rope to the halter, got in front of the colt, and pulled. The colt resisted. My friend pulled harder, and the colt planted his legs more firmly. So he really pulled, and the colt fell over. The process was repeated several times until my friend made this assessment: in just four or five minutes he had successfully taught the colt to fall over. All he had to do was get in front of the colt, pick up the rope, and over it would go.

His wife, watching this process, finally suggested that instead of getting in front of the colt and pulling, he might try wrapping the rope around the colt and simply walking alongside. To my friend's chagrin, it worked.

There seems to be something inside each of us that resists being told or pushed or pulled. But if someone puts an arm around a young man and walks alongside him, he is likely to follow along with a desire to serve. Please remember this as you strengthen the testimony of *one more* who can serve.

Making missionary service a tradition

May I make three suggestions for your consideration to help establish a rich tradition of missionary service in your family, stakes, wards, or branches?

First, make sure all of our youth understand who they are. From their earliest days in Primary, our children sing "I Am a Child of God" (*Hymns*, no. 301). Help

them to know what it really means to be a child of God. Remind them that they are here at this particular time in the history of the world, with the fulness of the gospel at their fingertips, because they made valiant choices in the premortal existence. Our youth need to stand firm for righteousness and truth. They need the vision of the blessings that can be theirs as they demonstrate their love for Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through their willingness to serve.

Second, teach the doctrine. While activities and social events have their appropriate place in our overall youth program, it is the doctrine that converts and commits. Our youth have a right to expect that their parents and Church leaders and teachers will see that they know and understand the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost will confirm the truth to their hearts and will ignite the Light of Christ in their souls. And then you will have *one more* fully prepared missionary. Yesterday, Elder Richard G. Scott suggested that *Preach My Gospel*, the new guide that our missionaries are now using to teach the gospel, can be a good resource to help you.

Finally, we recognize that it may not be wise for some of our young men and young women to face the rigors and challenges of a full-time mission. If priesthood leaders excuse any of you from full-time missionary service, we ask you and your families to accept the decision and move forward. You can prepare to participate in the saving ordinances of the temple and find other ways to be of service. And we ask all of our members to be supportive and to show great love and understanding in assisting all of our faithful youth in their various Church callings.

Brothers and sisters, I add my testimony of the divine mission of the Lord Jesus Christ and pray that He will bless all of us in our efforts to inspire and motivate more of our youth and couples to serve a full-time mission. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder David E. Sorensen

A military dream put on hold

Recommendation for a full-time mission

In the early 1950s the United States was at war on the Korean peninsula. Because of the draft policy of the government at that time, young men were not allowed to serve missions but instead were required to join the military. Knowing this, I enrolled in the Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps when I went to college. My goal was to become an officer like my oldest brother. However, when I made a visit home for the Christmas holiday, my home-ward bishop, Vern Freeman, invited me into his office. He advised me that a young Church leader by the name of Brother Gordon B. Hinckley had negotiated an agreement with the U.S. government permitting each ward in the Church in the United States to call one young man to serve a mission. This young man would receive an automatic deferment from the military during his mission.

Bishop Freeman said he had been praying about it and felt he should recommend me to serve as a full-time missionary representing our ward. I explained to him that I had already made other plans—I had enrolled in the Army ROTC and expected to become an officer! My bishop gently reminded me that he had been prompted to recommend me to serve a mission at that particular time. He said, "Go home and talk to your parents and come back this evening with your answer."

I went home and told my father and mother what had happened. They said the bishop was inspired, and I should happily accept the Lord's invitation to serve. My mother could see how disappointed I was at the prospect of not becoming an army officer right away. She quoted:

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."¹

That night I went back to the bishop's office and accepted his invitation. He told me to go to the Selective Service Office and advise them of my decision.

When I did so, to my surprise the lady who was chairman of the Selective Service Office told me, "If you accept a mission call, you will receive your draft notice before you can reenter Army ROTC. You will serve as an enlisted man, not as an officer."

Standing by convictions brings opportunity

Despite this unexpected change, my mission was wonderful. It changed the course of my life as it does for those who serve. But true to their word, the government sent an induction letter drafting me into the U.S. Army about one month before my mission release.

After boot camp and military police school, I found myself assigned to an army base to work as a military policeman. One night I was given an all-night assignment to escort a convoy of prisoners from one camp to another.

During the night the convoy stopped at a halfway point for a rest. The commanding officer instructed us to go into the restaurant and drink coffee so we could stay awake the rest of the night. Right away he noticed that I declined. He said, "Soldier, you need to drink some coffee to stay awake the rest of this trip. I do not want any prisoners escaping or causing trouble on my watch."

I said, "Sir, I respectfully decline. I am a Mormon, and I don't drink coffee."

He didn't care for my answer, and he again admonished me to drink the coffee.

Again, I politely refused. I took my place at the rear of the bus, my weapon in hand, praying in my heart that I would stay

awake and never have to use it. The trip ended uneventfully.

A few days later the same commanding officer invited me into his office for a private interview. He told me that even though he had worried that I would not be able to stay awake during the all-night trip, he appreciated that I had stood by my convictions. Then to my amazement he said his assistant was being transferred and he was recommending me to be his new assistant!

For most of the next two years I had many opportunities for leadership and managerial assignments. As it turned out, the positive experiences during my military service were more than I had ever dreamed possible.

Faith and obedience are the answer

From this simple story—and many more like it over the course of my life—I have learned that faith and obedience are the answers to our concerns, cares, and suffering. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is truly the power that can change our lives and lead us to salvation.

How can we build this faith? Through our actions. We must “go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded,”² just as Nephi counseled. We must trust in the Lord with all our hearts, as my mother so lovingly taught me. Gratefully, many times when we exercise faith to do the Lord’s will, we find that we are richly blessed for our obedience.

Even the faithful sometimes suffer

Sometimes, though, we find that even when we do our best to serve the Lord, we still suffer. You may know someone who faces these most challenging of circumstances. Consider the parent whose child becomes ill, for whom everyone prays and fasts with all their heart and soul, but who ultimately dies; or the missionary who sac-

rifices to go on a mission, then develops a terrible illness that leaves him or her severely disabled or in chronic pain; or the woman who lives her life as faithfully and obediently as she can but is never able to have the children she hopes for; or the wife who does her very best making a good home for her family and raising her children but whose husband leaves her.

The scriptures have many examples of people who were saved after showing great faith, such as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. But the scriptures also have many examples of devout people who did not get divine intervention during a crisis. Abinadi was burned at the stake; John the Baptist was beheaded; Alma and Amulek’s followers were cast into the flames. To do well does not mean everything will always turn out well. The key is to remember that faith and obedience are still the answers—even when things go wrong, perhaps especially when things go wrong.

Solace from the Savior during adversity

Remember the Lord has promised that He will help us as we face adversity. He has particular compassion for those who suffer. It was He who said, “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.”³

As part of the Atonement, our Savior suffered all things. He knows physical and emotional pain; He knows the sorrow of loss and betrayal. But He showed us that ultimately love, patience, humility, and obedience are the path to true peace and happiness. Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.” But then, to warn us to look for more than just worldly comfort, Jesus added, “Not as the world giveth, give I unto you.”⁴ The world sees peace as the absence of conflict or pain, but Jesus offers us solace despite our suffering. His life was not free of conflict or pain, but it was free of fear and full of meaning. The Apostle Peter wrote:

"If, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: . . .

"Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously."⁵

We who have accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior must rely wholly on the merits of Christ. He will save us after all we can do. When we courageously exercise our faith and when we go forward relying on the merits of Christ, He will bless us and guide us in all of our efforts. He will strengthen us and bring us peace in the time of our trials. "For we walk by faith, not by sight."⁶ I pray that each of us can better learn to put our trust in the Lord and to increase our faith in Him.

President Hinckley is a living seer

Now, brothers and sisters, in closing I wish to mention one other topic. Over the past years I have been blessed to be able to observe President Hinckley closely, and I want to remind you that President Hinckley

is not only a living prophet but also a living seer. He sees things that others do not see. He has the gift of discernment; he is an optimist and a realist. I wish to express my gratitude to the Lord for preserving President Hinckley's life and permitting him and his noble counselors to lead the Church for these past 10 years. Through President Hinckley's divine guidance, the Church has received many far-reaching blessings, many that are not obvious. I strongly encourage each of you to more closely follow his counsel and guidance, for truly "a seer hath the Lord raised up unto his people."⁷

Jesus is the Christ. Joseph Smith is the prophet of the Restoration. President Gordon B. Hinckley is our living prophet. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Proverbs 3:5–6.
2. 1 Nephi 3:7.
3. Matthew 5:4.
4. John 14:27.
5. 1 Peter 2:20–21, 23.
6. 2 Corinthians 5:7.
7. Moses 6:36.

The choir and congregation sang
"Sweet Is the Work."

Sister Kathleen H. Hughes

The importance of Christlike friends

A few weeks ago my husband and I attended a temple session. As we entered, we were greeted by a temple worker, a dear friend from our ward. That greeting began a remarkable experience for us. We were met and served, more than any time I remember, by many people we knew: friends from previous wards, friends from the community, men and women we had served with in various callings. The last person I encountered was a young woman I didn't recognize. She was lovely, and when she be-

gan to speak, I immediately remembered: Robin, one of the young women in my Laurel class when I was first a Young Women president. As we visited and exchanged memories and life updates, she told me how much that time had meant to her. I felt the same way.

I left the temple feeling moved by so much kindness, aware how important friends have been to me throughout my life. The Lord has touched my spirit time and again, and more often than not, His touch has reached me through the hand of a friend.

A father's example of friendship

Thirty-eight years ago this month, Dean and I, then newlyweds, traveled to New Mexico to visit my parents. While we were there, my father took us on a day trip into the mountains in the northern part of the state. In the afternoon we encountered a car stranded on the roadside with a flat tire. The driver told my father that his spare was also flat and he needed a ride to the nearest town to get the tire fixed. My father, seeing the man's family inside the car, said to him, "You'll never be able to get to town and back before dark. But listen, you have the same size wheel as mine. Take my spare, and the next time you come to Albuquerque, bring it back to me."

The stranger, shocked by the offer, said, "But you don't even know me."

Daddy's response, typical for him, was, "You're an honest man, aren't you? You'll bring the tire back."

A few weeks later I asked my dad about the spare tire. He told me that it had been returned.

My father, now in his 90th year, still goes about his life the same way. Most people his age *receive* meals-on-wheels, but my dad *delivers* food to the "aged." He's often at the bedside of friends who are ill or dying. He goes out with his chain saw, helping the Rotary club with their annual cleanup efforts. As I think of Daddy's life and actions, I'm reminded of President Boyd K. Packer's thought: he's "active in the gospel" (in Conference Report, Apr. 2003, 87; or *Ensign*, May 2003, 82). His life, as the hymn suggests, touches lives for good, and in the touching, all are enriched (see "Each Life That Touches Ours for Good," *Hymns*, no. 293). My father understands friendship.

Recognizing the love of the Lord

As a Relief Society presidency, we sometimes hear women say that they don't feel the love of the Lord. But perhaps they

would feel more of His love if they looked for His hand in the actions of those who care for them. It may be a member of their branch or ward, a neighbor, or even a stranger who blesses them and manifests Christ's love. Elder Henry B. Eyring instructed us: "You are called to represent the Savior. Your voice to testify becomes the same as His voice, your hands to lift the same as His hands" (in Conference Report, Oct. 2002, 80; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, 76). If we can lift others in Christ's name, surely we can also be lifted.

One home teacher I know faithfully made monthly visits to an elderly widow. More than just visit, however, each fall he winterized the sister's air conditioner and checked the filter on her furnace. Was that God's love or the love of the home teacher? The answer, of course, is both.

What greater gift dost thou bestow,
What greater goodness can we know
Than Christlike friends, whose gentle
ways
Strengthen our faith, enrich our days.
[*Hymns*, no. 293]

Treasured friends

I have been blessed throughout my life with Christlike friends—from friends of my youth to the many people who have blessed our family in all the wards we have lived in. Their faith and commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ, their service, their wise and gentle instruction have enriched our lives. Some of my friends are very different from me. We disagree about things, and we can even irritate each other. But friendship allows for differences—in fact, it embraces them. I love to visit stakes made up of people from a variety of backgrounds, ages, and ethnic origins.

I'm experiencing right now a special dimension of sisterhood and friendship as I serve with Sisters Parkin and Pingree and the other women in the auxiliary presidencies and boards. These are *good* women.

Oh, how I love them. After three years together, my dear sisters in the presidency know me well. They know my faith and testimony, but they also know my insecurities and worries. They know that when I'm tired after a long training trip, I'm not my best self. But I feel their love and patience, and I know they still think the best of me. Their testimonies and prayers bolster me. Their laughter brightens my day. In every sense we are sisters.

I have had similar experiences with my own family. One of my younger sisters has been struggling with cancer the past few months. We don't live close, but phone calls bring her near. We have shared love, prayers, memories, and tender testimonies as she has gone through this difficult ordeal. My sisters are treasured friends. So are my brothers, my dear husband, my children, and my grandchildren (no matter how noisy those grandchildren are).

Overcome hurt feelings and become one

In the early years of the Restoration, new members gathered to create Zion. Zion was both a place and purpose—a spirit. We no longer gather in the same way. Our branches and wards are now our Zion. But they take on the spirit of Zion only when members care for one another. Sadly, we sometimes hear of women and men who have had their feelings hurt and become alienated by other Church members. If you are on either side of this dilemma—the offender or the one who has been offended—seek forgiveness; see your own part in the fault. Remember Christ's admonition to us: "I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine" (D&C 38:27).

Joseph—friend to humanity and the Lord

I recently had the opportunity to speak to a woman who asked me about Joseph Smith. She was clearly skeptical about his calling and mission. As I spoke to her, the

words of the Lord to Oliver Cowdery came to me: "Stand by my servant Joseph, faithfully" (D&C 6:18). I hope that on that day, and at every moment in my life, it can be said of me, "She stood by Joseph." I want to be his friend.

Joseph Smith himself was a great friend to many. He said, "Friendship is one of the grand fundamental principles of 'Mormonism'; [it is designed] to revolutionize and civilize the world, and cause wars and contentions to cease and men to become friends and brothers" (*History of the Church*, 5:517).

And yet he knew that friendship was more than an abstraction. He learned one day that a brother's house had been burned by enemies. When Church members said they felt sorry for him, the Prophet took some money from his pocket and said, "I feel sorry for this brother to the amount of five dollars. How much do you . . . feel sorry [for him]?" (in Hyrum L. Andrus and Helen Mac Andrus, comps., *They Knew the Prophet* [1974], 150).

Do we feel about friendship as the Prophet Joseph did? Do we turn our good feelings into practical assistance? God knows the needs of His children, and He often works through us, prompting us to help one another. When we act on such promptings, we tread on holy ground, for we are allowed the opportunity to serve as an agent of God in answering a prayer.

Be a friend to the Savior

Brothers and sisters, if we are friends to the Prophet Joseph, then we are friends to the Savior as well. Do we live lives that proclaim "devotion to the Savior's name"? (see *Hymns*, no. 293). Joseph Smith did, and in this year as we honor the man who ushered in the dispensation of the fulness of times, we should remember not only his friendship to humanity, but his friendship and dedication to the Lord. The Prophet said: "I will try to be contented with my lot, knowing that God is my friend. In Him

I shall find comfort" (*The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, comp. Dean C. Jessee [1984], 239; spelling and punctuation standardized).

It should be obvious to each of us that our ultimate friendship should be with our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. The Savior has affectionately said to us, "I will call you friends, for you are my friends" (D&C 93:45). His greatest desire for us, His brothers and sisters, is to bring us back to our Father. And the way for us is clear: Develop in our lives, to the degree that we can, the qualities and attributes of Christ; obey His commandments, and do His work and His will.

As I think back to the day I was greeted in the temple by so many I loved, I like to imagine that our daily lives can be equally blessed. I felt a love that seemed a glimpse of the pure love of Christ—the charity that should fill our hearts. I picture

wards and branches where friends of all ages and backgrounds stand together and model their lives on the teachings of Jesus Christ.

I bear you my testimony today that Christ lives. I give thanks for Him. I pray that I may always be His friend and that in doing so, I will be your friend as well. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Hinckley

We shall now hear from Elder Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The choir will then sing "We Ever Pray for Thee."

Following the singing, it will be my privilege to address you. The choir will then sing "Praise to the Man," and the benediction will be offered by Elder Shirley D. Christensen of the Seventy. The concluding session of this conference will begin at 2:00 this afternoon.

Elder Henry B. Eyring

A message for converts

My message is to those who are converts to the Church. More than half the members of the Church today chose to be baptized after the age of eight. So you are not the exception in the Church. To you I wish to say how much the Lord loves you and trusts you. And even more, I wish to tell you how much He depends on you.

You felt His love at least to some degree when you were baptized. Years ago I took a young man, 20 years of age, into the waters of baptism. My companion and I had taught him the gospel. He was the first in his family to hear the message of the restored gospel. He asked to be baptized. The testimony of the Spirit made him want to follow the example of the Savior, who was baptized by John the Baptist even though He was without sin.

As I brought that young man up out of the waters of baptism, he surprised me by throwing his arms around my neck and whispering in my ear, tears streaming down his face, "I'm clean; I'm clean." That same young man, after we laid our hands on his head with the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood and conferred on him the Holy Ghost, said to me, "When you spoke those words, I felt something like fire go down from the top of my head through my body, all the way to my feet."

Your experience will have been unique to you, but to some degree you felt the magnitude of the blessing which came to you. Since then, you have felt the reality of the promises made to you and the promises you made. You have felt the cleansing that came from your baptism, because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. And you have felt the change in your heart as the

Holy Ghost has become your companion. Your desires have begun to change.

The desire to be bound forever as a family

When someone tells me that he or she is a convert to the Church, I ask, "Has anyone else in your family accepted the gospel?" When the answer is "Yes," there follows an excited description of the happy miracle in the life of a parent or a brother or sister or a grandparent. There is joy in knowing that someone in his or her family is sharing the blessing and the happiness. When the answer is "No, so far I am the only member," he or she will almost always speak of parents, saying something like this, "No, not yet. But I am still trying." And you can tell from the sound in the voice that the convert will never stop trying, not ever.

The Lord knew you would have those feelings when He allowed you to receive the covenants which are blessing your life. He knew you would feel a desire for your family to share the blessings you felt coming into the Church. Even more, He knew how that desire would increase when you came to know the joy of the promises He makes to us in sacred temples. There, for those who qualify, He lets us make covenants with Him. We promise to obey His commandments. And He promises us, if we are faithful, that we may live with Him in glory in families forever in the world to come.

In His loving-kindness, He knew you would have a desire to be bound forever to your parents and their parents. You may have had a grandfather like mine, who always seemed to treasure my visits. I thought I was his favorite grandchild until my cousins told me they felt the same way. He is gone now. All my grandparents and their ancestors have died. Many of your ancestors died never having the chance to accept the gospel and to receive the blessings and promises you have received. The Lord is fair, and He is loving.

And so He prepared for you and me a way for us to have the desire of our hearts to offer to our ancestors all the blessings He has offered us.

The plan to make that possible has been in place from the beginning. The Lord gave promises to His children long ago. The very last book of the Old Testament is the book of the prophet Malachi. And the last words are a sweet promise and a stern warning:

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:

"And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."¹

Some of those words are crucial to understand. The great and dreadful day of the Lord is the end of the world. Jehovah, the Messiah, will come in glory. The wicked will all be destroyed. We live in the last days. Time could be running out for us to do what we have promised to do.

Elijah restored the sealing power

It is important to know why the Lord promised to send Elijah. Elijah was a great prophet with great power given him by God. He held the greatest power God gives to His children: he held the sealing power, the power to bind on earth and have it bound in heaven. God gave it to the Apostle Peter. And the Lord kept His promise to send Elijah. Elijah came to the Prophet Joseph Smith on April 3, 1836, just after the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, the first temple built after the Restoration of the gospel. Joseph described the sacred moment:

"Another great and glorious vision burst upon us; for Elijah the prophet, who was taken to heaven without tasting death, stood before us, and said:

"Behold, the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of Malachi—testifying that he [Elijah] should be

sent, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord come—

“To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse—

“Therefore, the keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands; and by this ye may know that the great and dreadful day of the Lord is near, even at the doors.”²

Missionary work in the spirit world

As you came into the Church, you have felt your heart being turned toward family, both those who are living and those who are in the spirit world. The Lord provided another vision to help you know what to do with those feelings.

After Joseph Smith, the Lord called other prophets to lead His Church. One was Joseph F. Smith. He saw in vision what happened in the spirit world when the Savior appeared there between the time of His death and His Resurrection.³ President Smith saw the joy of the spirits when they learned that the Savior had broken the bands of death and that because of His Atonement they could be resurrected. And he saw the Savior organize His servants among the spirits to preach His gospel to every spirit and offer the chance to choose the covenants and the blessings which are offered to you and which you want for your ancestors. All are to have that chance.

President Smith also saw the leaders the Savior called to take the gospel to Heavenly Father's children in the spirit world. He named some of them: Father Adam, Mother Eve, Noah, Abraham, Ezekiel, Elijah, prophets we know from the Book of Mormon, and some from the last days, including Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, John Taylor, and Wilford Woodruff. Think of the power of those missionaries to teach the gospel and to touch the hearts of your ancestors. It is not surprising that Wilford Woodruff said while he lived

that he believed few, if any, of the ancestors of the Latter-day Saints in the spirit world would choose to reject the message of salvation when they heard it.⁴

Performing ordinances for ancestors

Many of your deceased ancestors will have received a testimony that the message of the missionaries is true. When you received that testimony, you could ask the missionaries for baptism. But those who are in the spirit world cannot. The ordinances you so cherish are offered only in this world. Someone in this world must go to a holy temple and accept the covenants on behalf of the person in the spirit world. That is why we are under obligation to find the names of our ancestors and ensure that they are offered by us what they cannot receive there without our help.

For me, knowing that turns my heart not only to my ancestors who wait but to the missionaries who teach them. I will see those missionaries in the spirit world, and so will you. Think of a faithful missionary standing there with those he has loved and taught who are your ancestors. Picture as I do the smile on the face of that missionary as you walk up to him and your ancestors whom he converted but could not baptize or have sealed to family until you came to the rescue. I do not know what the protocol will be in such a place, but I imagine arms thrown around your neck and tears of gratitude.

If you can imagine the smile of the missionary and your ancestor, think of the Savior when you meet Him. You will have that interview. He paid the price of the sins of you and all of Heavenly Father's spirit children. He is Jehovah. He sent Elijah. He conferred the powers of the priesthood to seal and to bless out of perfect love. And He has trusted you by letting you hear the gospel in your lifetime, giving you the chance to accept the obligation to offer it to those of your ancestors who did not have your priceless opportunity. Think

of the gratitude He has for those who pay the price in work and faith to find the names of their ancestors and who love them and Him enough to offer them eternal life in families, the greatest of all the gifts of God. He offered them an infinite sacrifice. He will love and appreciate those who paid whatever price they could to allow their ancestors to choose His offer of eternal life.

Hearts bound together

Because your heart has already been turned, the price may not seem high. You begin by doing simple things. Write down what you already know about your family. You will need to write down the names of parents and their parents with the dates of birth or death or marriage. When you can, you will want to record the places. Some of that you will know from memory. But you can also ask relatives. They may even have some certificates of births, marriages, or deaths. Make copies and organize them. If you learn stories about their lives, write them down and keep them. You are not just gathering names. Those you never met in life will become friends you love. Your heart will be bound to theirs forever.

You can start searching in the first few generations going back in time. From that you will identify many of your ancestors who need your help. Someone in your own ward or branch of the Church has been called to help you prepare those names for the temple. There they can be offered the covenants which will free them from their spirit prisons and bind them in families—your family—forever.

Ancestors look down in hope

Your opportunities and the obligations they create are remarkable in the whole history of the world. There are more temples across the earth than there have ever been. More people in all the world have felt the Spirit of Elijah move them to record the identities of their ancestors

and facts of their ancestors' lives. There are more resources to search out your ancestors than there have ever been in the history of the world. The Lord has poured out knowledge about how to make that information available worldwide through technology that a few years ago would have seemed a miracle.

With those opportunities there comes greater obligation to keep our trust with the Lord. Where much is given, much is required.⁵ After you find the first few generations, the road will become more difficult. The price will become greater. As you go back in time, the records become less complete. As others of your family search out ancestors, you will discover that the ancestor you find has already been offered the full blessings of the temple. Then you will have a difficult and important choice to make. You will be tempted to stop and leave the hard work of finding to others who are more expert or to another time in your life. But you will also feel a tug on your heart to go on in the work, hard as it will be.

As you decide, remember that the names which will be so difficult to find are of real people to whom you owe your existence in this world and whom you will meet again in the spirit world. When you were baptized, your ancestors looked down on you with hope. Perhaps after centuries, they rejoiced to see one of their descendants make a covenant to find them and to offer them freedom. In your reunion, you will see in their eyes either gratitude or terrible disappointment. Their hearts are bound to you. Their hope is in your hands. You will have more than your own strength as you choose to labor on to find them.

A few nights ago I had a dream. I saw a piece of white paper with a name on it I did not know and a date I could only partially read. I got up and went to the records of my family. The last name on the slip of paper is from a line which came into my mother's ancestry 300 years ago in a place called Eaton Bray. Someone is anxious for

a long wait to end. I have not yet found that person. But I have found again the assurance that a loving God sends help in answer to prayer in this sacred work of redeeming our families, which is His work and His glory and to which we have pledged our hearts. I so testify, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Malachi 4:5–6.

2. Doctrine and Covenants 110:13–16.
3. See Doctrine and Covenants 138.
4. See “Discourse by President Wilford Woodruff,” *Millennial Star*, May 28, 1894, 339–40.
5. See Luke 12:48.

The choir sang “We Ever Pray for Thee.”

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Remembering the Prophet Joseph

My brothers and sisters, as we have been reminded, we will commemorate next December the 200th anniversary of the birth of the Prophet Joseph Smith. In the meantime, many things will occur in celebration of this significant occasion.

Books will be published, symposia participated in by various scholars, pageants, a new motion picture, and a great many other things.

In anticipation of this, I have felt, as 15th in succession from his great pinnacle of achievement, to offer my testimony of his divine calling.

The great things which God has revealed

I hold in my hand a precious little book. It was published in Liverpool, England, by Orson Pratt in 1853, 152 years ago. It is Lucy Mack Smith’s narrative of her son’s life.

It recounts in some detail Joseph’s various visits with the angel Moroni and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

The book tells that upon hearing of Joseph’s encounter with the angel, his brother Alvin suggested that the family get together and listen to him as he detailed “the great things which God has revealed to you” (*Biographical Sketches of Joseph*

Smith the Prophet and His Progenitors of Many Generations [1853], 84).

I take that statement as the subject of my talk—the great things which God has revealed through Joseph the Prophet. Permit me to name a few of many doctrines and practices which distinguish us from all other churches, and all of which have come of revelation to the youthful Prophet. They are familiar to you, but they are worth repeating and reflecting on.

The nature of Deity

The first of these, of course, is the manifestation of God Himself and His Beloved Son, the risen Lord Jesus Christ. This grand theophany is, in my judgment, the greatest such event since the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord in the meridian of time. We have no record of any other event to equal it.

For centuries men gathered and argued concerning the nature of Deity. Constantine assembled scholars of various factions at Nicaea in the year 325. After two months of bitter debate, they compromised on a definition which for generations has been the doctrinal statement among Christians concerning the Godhead.

I invite you to read that definition and compare it with the statement of the boy Joseph. He simply says that God stood be-

fore him and spoke to him. Joseph could see Him and could hear Him. He was in form like a man, a being of substance. Beside Him was the resurrected Lord, a separate being, whom He introduced as His Beloved Son and with whom Joseph also spoke.

I submit that in the short time of that remarkable vision, Joseph learned more concerning Deity than all of the scholars and clerics of the past.

In this divine revelation there was reaffirmed beyond doubt the reality of the literal resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This knowledge of Deity, hidden from the world for centuries, was the first and great thing which God revealed to His chosen servant.

And upon the reality and truth of this vision rests the validity of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The Book of Mormon

I speak next of another very important thing which God revealed.

The Christian world accepts the Bible as the word of God. Most have no idea of how it came to us.

I have just completed reading a newly published book by a renowned scholar. It is apparent from information which he gives that the various books of the Bible were brought together in what appears to have been an unsystematic fashion. In some cases, the writings were not produced until long after the events they describe. One is led to ask, "Is the Bible true? Is it really the word of God?"

We reply that it is, insofar as it is translated correctly. The hand of the Lord was in its making. But it now does not stand alone. There is another witness of the significant and important truths found therein.

Scripture declares that "in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established" (2 Corinthians 13:1).

The Book of Mormon has come forth by the gift and power of God. It speaks as a voice from the dust in testimony of the Son of God. It speaks of His birth, of His ministry, of His crucifixion and resurrection, and of His appearance to the righteous in the land Bountiful on the American continent.

It is a tangible thing that can be handled, that can be read, that can be tested. It carries within its covers a promise of its divine origin. Millions now have put it to the test and found it to be a true and sacred record.

It has been named by those not of our faith as one of 20 books ever published in America that have had the greatest influence upon those who have read them.

As the Bible is the testament of the Old World, the Book of Mormon is the testament of the New. They go hand in hand in declaration of Jesus as the Son of the Father.

In the past 10 years alone, 51 million copies have been distributed. It is now available in 106 languages.

This sacred book, which came forth as a revelation of the Almighty, is indeed another testament of the divinity of our Lord.

I would think that the whole Christian world would reach out and welcome it and embrace it as a vibrant testimony. It represents another great and basic contribution which came as a revelation to the Prophet.

The priesthood

Another is the restored priesthood. Priesthood is the authority to act in the name of God. That authority is the keystone of any religion. I have read another book recently. It deals with the Apostasy of the primitive Church. If the authority of that Church was lost, how was it to be replaced?

Priesthood authority came from the only place it could come, and that is from

heaven. It was bestowed under the hands of those who held it when the Savior walked the earth.

First, there was John the Baptist, who conferred the Aaronic, or lesser priesthood. This was followed by a visitation of Peter, James, and John, Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, who conferred upon Joseph and Oliver Cowdery the Melchizedek Priesthood, which had been received by these Apostles under the hands of the Lord Himself when in life He said:

“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19).

How beautiful is the unfolding of the pattern of restoration which led to the organization of the Church in the year 1830, 175 years ago this week. The very name of the Church came of revelation. Whose church was it? Was it Joseph Smith’s? Was it Oliver Cowdery’s? No, it was the Church of Jesus Christ restored to earth in these latter days.

The potential for families to be eternal

Another great and singular revelation given to the Prophet was the plan for the eternal life of the family.

The family is a creation of the Almighty. It represents the most sacred of all relationships. It represents the most serious of all undertakings. It is the fundamental organization of society.

Through the revelations of God to His Prophet came the doctrine and authority under which families are sealed together not only for this life but for all eternity.

I think that if we had the capacity to teach effectively this one doctrine, it would capture the interest of millions of husbands and wives who love one another and who love their children, but whose marriage is in effect only “until death do you part.”

Innocence of children; method of baptism

The innocence of little children is another revelation which God has given through the instrumentality of the Prophet Joseph. The general practice is the baptism of infants to take away the effects of what is described as the sin of Adam and Eve. Under the doctrine of the Restoration, baptism is for the remission of one’s individual and personal sins. It becomes a covenant between God and man. It is performed at the age of accountability, when people are old enough to recognize right from wrong. It is by immersion, in symbolism of the death and burial of Jesus Christ and His coming forth in the Resurrection.

Salvation for the dead

I go on to mention another revealed truth.

We are told that God is no respecter of persons, and yet in no other church of which I am aware is provision made for those beyond the veil of death to receive every blessing which is afforded the living. The great doctrine of salvation for the dead is unique to this Church.

Men boast that they are “saved” and in the same breath admit that their forebears have not been and cannot be saved.

Jesus’s Atonement in behalf of all represents a great vicarious sacrifice. He set the pattern under which He became a proxy for all mankind. This pattern under which one man can act in behalf of another is carried forward in the ordinances of the house of the Lord. Here we serve in behalf of those who have died without a knowledge of the gospel. Theirs is the option to accept or reject the ordinance which is performed. They are placed on an equal footing with those who walk the earth. The dead are given the same opportunity as the living. Again, what a glorious and wonderful provision the Almighty has made through His revelation to His Prophet.

The eternal nature of man

The eternal nature of man has been revealed. We are sons and daughters of God. God is the Father of our spirits. We lived before we came here. We had personality. We were born into this life under a divine plan. We are here to test our worthiness, acting in the agency which God has given to us. When we die, we shall go on living. Our eternal life is comprised of three phases: one, our premortal existence; two, our mortal existence; and three, our postmortal existence. In death we die to this world and step through the veil into the sphere we are worthy to enter. This, again, is a unique, singular, and precious doctrine of this Church which has come through revelation.

Modern revelation

I offer this brief summary of the tremendous outpouring of knowledge and authority from God upon the head of His prophet. Were there time, I could speak of others. There is one more that I must mention. This is the principle of modern revelation. The article of faith which the Prophet wrote declares:

“We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Articles of Faith 1:9).

A growing church, a church that is spreading across the earth in these complex times, needs constant revelation from the throne of heaven to guide it and move it forward.

With prayer and anxious seeking of the will of the Lord, we testify that direction is received, that revelation comes, and that the Lord blesses His Church as it moves on its path of destiny.

Go forward in faith

On the solid foundation of the Prophet Joseph’s divine calling and the revelations

of God which came through him, we go forward. Much has been accomplished in bringing us to this present day. But there is much more to be done in the process of taking this restored gospel to “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Revelation 14:6).

I rejoice in the opportunity of association with you as we go forward in faith. The burden is at times heavy, as you well know. But let us not complain. Let us walk in faith, each doing our part.

An incomparable outpouring

In this year of celebration, through our own performance, let us honor the Prophet, through whom God has revealed so much.

The sun rose on Joseph’s life on a cold day in Vermont in 1805. It set in Illinois on a sultry afternoon in 1844. During the brief 38½ years of his life, there came through him an incomparable outpouring of knowledge, gifts, and doctrine. Looked at objectively, there is nothing to compare with it. Subjectively, it is the substance of the personal testimony of millions of Latter-day Saints across the earth. You and I are honored to be among these.

As a boy I loved to hear a man who, with a rich baritone voice, sang the words of John Taylor:

The Seer, the Seer, Joseph, the Seer! . . .
I love to dwell on his memory dear;
The chosen of God and the friend of
man,
He brought the priesthood back again;
He gazed on the past and the future,
too, . . .
And opened the heavenly world to view.
[“The Seer, Joseph, the Seer,” *Hymns*
(1948), no. 296]

He was truly a seer. He was a revelator. He was a prophet of the living God who has spoken to his own and all future generations.

To this I add my solemn witness of the divinity of his calling, of the virtue of his life, and of the sealing of his testimony with his death, in the sacred name of our Redeemer, even the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "Praise to the Man."
Elder Shirley D. Christensen offered the benediction.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

The fifth session of the 175th Annual General Conference convened in the Conference Center at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, April 3, 2005. President Thomas S. Monson conducted this session.

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music for this session. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir, and Linda Margetts was the organist.

President Monson made the following remarks as the meeting began.

President Thomas S. Monson

We welcome you this afternoon to the fifth and concluding session of the 175th Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who presides at this conference, has asked that I, Brother Monson, conduct this session.

We extend our greetings and blessings to members of the Church and many friends everywhere who are participating in these proceedings by radio, television, the Internet, or satellite transmission.

The music for this session will be provided by the Tabernacle Choir, under the direction of Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg, with Linda Margetts at the organ.

The choir will open these services by singing "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty." The invocation will then be offered by Elder Carlos H. Amado of the Seventy.

Following the invocation, the choir will sing "Where Can I Turn for Peace?" At the conclusion of the singing, Elders L. Tom Perry and Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles will address us. They will be followed by Elder Robert J. Whetten of the Seventy.

The choir sang "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty."

Elder Carlos H. Amado offered the invocation.

The choir sang "Where Can I Turn for Peace?"

Elder L. Tom Perry

What seek ye?

It is always difficult to follow this magnificent choir. Thank you, choir, again for your beautiful music.

"Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples;

"And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!

"And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

"Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye?" (John 1:35–38).

We find a world today looking for answers to the question "What seek ye?" in so many different ways. Too many are

sowing seeds of a fruit that will not nourish an eternal soul.

Discussion on a train in Europe

Let me illustrate with an experience the Europe Central Area Presidency had while traveling by train to a meeting. We were taking advantage of the time together by discussing our assignment. A man who was seated across the aisle became curious about our conversation. He finally asked, "Are you Protestant or Catholic?" We replied, "Neither. We are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." He acknowledged that he had heard of the Church but then went on to say, "You'll never get very far in this country. The government only recognizes the Catholic and Protestant churches. They are the only ones who receive government financial support. A church cannot exist without government financial support."

We tried to explain that our Church manages very well without government help—that we use the Lord's system of tithing. He insisted our Church would not get very far in his country and suggested that perhaps we should place our efforts in some other part of the world. Of course we testified that the Lord's system does work and told him about all the chapels and temples we are constructing throughout the world without having to resort to borrowed funds to build them. He seemed very surprised but still unconvinced.

Seeing that we could not persuade him that a church could exist without government support, we tried to change the subject. I asked, "What will happen in your country with the changes that are occurring? The declining population and the influx of an increasing number of immigrants will eventually make you a minority in your own land."

With great national pride, he replied, "This will never happen."

I countered, "How can you support such a position with immigration exceeding

your country's birthrate?" He kept insisting this would never happen in his country—"Why, they would close the borders of our land before they would allow it to occur."

I pressed on, "How can you prevent it with your current trends?"

His next statement shocked me: "I'm 82 years old. I will be long gone before we have to face that problem."

Apathy toward religion

A major problem we face in preaching the gospel in this area of the world is the general apathy toward religion, toward things spiritual. Too many are very comfortable with their present lifestyle and feel no need to do more than "eat, drink, and be merry" (Luke 12:19). They are not interested in anything but themselves—here and now.

Developing nations of the world are becoming so secular in their beliefs and actions that they reason that a human being has total autonomy. An individual does not have to give an account to anyone or anything except to himself and, to a limited extent, to the society in which he lives.

Societies in which this secular lifestyle takes root have a deep spiritual and moral price to pay. The pursuit of so-called individual freedoms, without regard to laws the Lord has established to govern His children on earth, will result in the curse of extreme worldliness and selfishness, the decline of public and private morality, and the defiance of authority.

The Church provides answers

Such secular societies are described in Doctrine and Covenants 1:16: "They seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness, but every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world."

For this reason the Lord's Church was instructed to follow the prophet and seek something different from what the world

is seeking. Continuing on with verses 17–18 from section 1:

“Wherefore, I the Lord, knowing the calamity which should come upon the inhabitants of the earth, called upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and spake unto him from heaven, and gave him commandments;

“And also gave commandments to others, that they should proclaim these things unto the world; and all this that it might be fulfilled, which was written by the prophets.”

It was through the Prophet Joseph Smith that the Church of Jesus Christ was restored to the earth—“line upon line, precept upon precept” (D&C 98:12). With divine assistance he translated and published the Book of Mormon. The Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods were conferred upon him and Oliver Cowdery, and sacred ordinances were reinstituted for the saving of mankind.

We boldly declare that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints provides answers to the question “What seek ye?” Our Church is the means by which men and women find our Savior and His gospel. You who are gathered here in this vast congregation, and the even greater numbers of Saints viewing this conference throughout the world, are richly blessed, for you have sought and found the restored Church.

Seek the Savior through His Church

The Church came into being as the result of a restoration and not a reformation. My recent experiences in central Europe certainly have deepened my respect for the role of those early Christian leaders who instituted a reformation. It began with their efforts to correct some of the errors in doctrine which had come into being during the long period of apostasy from the Church that had been established by our Savior during His earthly ministry. Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, the Lord’s mouth-

piece, and the restorer of all things important to building the kingdom of God and preparing for the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we seek our Savior, it is important that we seek Him through His Church. It is through His restored Church that we receive all the saving ordinances necessary to return to Him.

Stories about finding new hope and faith

I want all the members of the Church to know that I have learned from my current assignment that sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ involves challenges I had never before imagined. Yet every day I see new signs of hope, due mostly to the Lord’s blessings but also to the efforts of the leaders, members, and missionaries in that area of the world. Honest seekers of truth are finding answers to their questions—they are finding the Lord through His restored Church. Of the many examples I could give, let me give you three: a father, a young single adult, and a single sister who have found a new faith and a new hope in their lives.

A father’s change of heart

A family of four was initially contacted by sister missionaries, and from the very beginning the mother and her children often read in the Book of Mormon, prayed daily, and wanted to attend church. The father, however, resisted. Unlike his wife, he was not of a Christian faith, and he did not yet feel prepared to reevaluate his beliefs.

The sister missionaries were inspired to focus their teachings on Jesus Christ. In their words:

“We taught about Joseph Smith, of his faith in Christ, what we learn about Christ from the First Vision, and the Prophet’s testimony of our Savior. Everything we ever read together or challenged them to read as a family out of the Book of Mormon was teaching them more about our Redeemer. That is when we started seeing

the progress. They displayed a framed picture of Christ proudly in their family room—it was one we had given them as a gift.”

The father’s change of heart occurred when his wife announced that she wanted to be baptized and his sons decided to pray to know whether they should also be baptized. From that moment on, he read regularly in the Book of Mormon and prayed about baptism. His sincere desire to know whether the Church was true changed him, and he became a spiritual leader in his home. Just before he and his family were baptized, the father asked for a tithing slip and an envelope. He did not want to delay keeping the commandments for even one second.

A reactivated brother shares the gospel

In another case, a young brother was reactivated as the result of the establishment of the outreach initiative to bring into activity young single adults ages 18 to 30. On the first night of activities in one of our Church buildings, this brother was the only nonmissionary attending, but within a few weeks, he had brought about 30 people to family home evening and other activities.

This brother is a Web site designer—he and a partner started their own Web design business. He currently lives with two nonmembers, both of whom work at his Web design company. He is very bold about sharing his testimony. One of his co-workers previously had studied Christian theology, and this brother referred him to the missionaries working in the young single adult program. Now his co-worker is a regular attendee of the activities, and this reactivated brother assists the missionaries as they teach him by adding his testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel to theirs.

A young woman’s miraculous conversion

In still another case, a young woman from Hamburg, Germany, was struggling to find spiritual meaning to her life. She began

to pray and ask God what she should do. One morning, after three days of some fasting and much prayer, she walked from her home to the bus stop. As she arrived, she realized she had left some keys at home that she needed that day. She returned home, picked up the keys, and walked again to the bus stop. She was quite distraught as she realized she had missed the bus she would have normally taken.

Meanwhile, two missionaries were traveling on a bus near the city of Hamburg. As they were traveling, they suddenly had an impression that they should talk to the first person they met after exiting the bus. The two elders got out of the bus and instantly saw this young woman. They spoke to her briefly about the Church and set up an appointment to teach her. She had an immediate feeling that somehow the elders were sent to her as an answer to her prayers. The good members of the Church joined with the missionaries in teaching her and helping her feel a special part of their ward. She accepted the message of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and was baptized. Now she is working in the ward Young Women program.

The need for the Church

The Lord, during His earthly ministry, recognized the need to have a structure in place to build faith in the hearts of the members of His Church and to keep them growing in His gospel. This family, this brother, and this sister all found the Savior through finding and being strengthened by His Church.

After the death of the Apostles, without central leadership to guide and direct it, the Church drifted into apostasy. This particular lesson of history is clear: It is necessary to have a centralized Church government, under the direction of the Savior, that provides the necessary doctrines and ordinances for salvation and exaltation.

The Bible gives abundant evidence that the Lord, during His earthly ministry,

established His Church with the proper authority and organization. For example, Paul declared:

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

“For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Ephesians 4:11–15).

We state in our sixth article of faith, “We believe in the same organization that

existed in the Primitive Church, namely, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and so forth.”

Seek, find, and build the Savior’s Church

So we declare to the world that the priesthood has been restored, God’s government is on the earth, His pattern is established that will lead us back to His presence. We believe we have the best answer to the question “What seek ye?” As the Savior taught, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

Just as a building is constructed one brick at a time, the Savior’s true Church is built one conversion, one testimony, one baptism at a time. May we all seek, find, and build His Church wherever we may be is my humble prayer, in the name of Him whom we seek, even Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

The growing problem of pornography

Last summer Sister Oaks and I returned from two years in the Philippines. We loved our service there, and we loved returning home. When we have been away, we see our surroundings in a new light, with increased appreciation and sometimes with new concerns.

We were concerned to see the inroads pornography had made in the United States while we were away. For many years our Church leaders have warned against the dangers of images and words intended to arouse sexual desires. Now the corrupting influence of pornography, produced and disseminated for commercial gain, is sweeping over our society like an avalanche of evil.

At our last conference, President Gordon B. Hinckley devoted an entire talk to this subject, warning in the plainest terms that “this is a very serious problem even among us” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2004, 64; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 61). Most of the bishops we meet in stake conferences now report major concerns with this problem.

My fellow holders of the Melchizedek Priesthood, and also our young men, I wish to speak to you today about pornography. I know that many of you are exposed to this and that many of you are being stained by it.

Evil acts both completed and contemplated

In concentrating my talk on this subject, I feel like the prophet Jacob, who told

the men of his day that it grieved him to speak so boldly in front of their sensitive wives and children. But notwithstanding the difficulty of the task, he said he had to speak to the men about this subject because God had commanded him (see Jacob 2:7–11). I do so for the same reason.

In the second chapter of the book that bears his name, Jacob condemns men for their “whoredoms” (verses 23, 28). He told them they had “broken the hearts of [their] tender wives, and lost the confidence of [their] children, because of [their] bad examples before them” (v. 35). What were these grossly wicked “whoredoms”? No doubt some men were already guilty of evil acts. But the main focus of Jacob’s great sermon was not with evil acts *completed*, but with evil acts *contemplated*.

Jacob began his sermon by telling the men that “as yet, [they had] been obedient unto the word of the Lord” (Jacob 2:4). However, he then told them he knew their thoughts, that they were “beginning to labor in sin, which sin appeareth very abominable . . . unto God” (v. 5). “I must testify unto you concerning the wickedness of your hearts” (v. 6), he added. Jacob was speaking as Jesus spoke when He said, “Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matthew 5:28; see also 3 Nephi 12:28; D&C 59:6; 63:16).

Do not minimize the seriousness

More than 30 years ago, I urged BYU students to avoid the “promotional literature of illicit sexual relations” in what they read and viewed. I gave this analogy:

“Pornographic or erotic stories and pictures are worse than filthy or polluted food. The body has defenses to rid itself of unwholesome food. With a few fatal exceptions, bad food will only make you sick but do no permanent harm. In contrast, a person who feasts upon filthy stories or pornographic or erotic pictures and literature records them in this marvelous retrieval sys-

tem we call a brain. The brain won’t vomit back filth. Once recorded, it will always remain subject to recall, flashing its perverted images across your mind and drawing you away from the wholesome things in life.”¹

Here, brethren, I must tell you that our bishops and our professional counselors are seeing an increasing number of men involved with pornography, and many of those are active members. Some involved in pornography apparently minimize its seriousness and continue to exercise the priesthood of God because they think no one will know of their involvement. But the user knows, brethren, and so does the Lord.

Some have suggested that pornography should be a separate question in the temple recommend interview. It is already. At least five different questions should elicit a confession and discussion on this subject if the person being interviewed has the spiritual sensitivity and honesty we expect of those who worship in the house of the Lord.

Effects of pornography on spirituality

One of the Savior’s most memorable teachings applies to men who are secretly viewing pornography:

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

“Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also” (Matthew 23:25–26; see also Alma 60:23).

The Savior continues His denunciation of those who treat what is visible but neglect to cleanse the inner man:

“Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness.

“Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matthew 23:27–28).

The immediate spiritual consequences of such hypocrisy are devastating. Those who seek out and use pornography forfeit the power of their priesthood. The Lord declares:

“When we undertake to cover our sins, . . . behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man” (D&C 121:37).

Patrons of pornography also lose the companionship of the Spirit. Pornography produces fantasies that destroy spirituality. “To be carnally minded is death”—spiritual death (Romans 8:6; see also 2 Nephi 9:39).

The scriptures repeatedly teach that the Spirit of the Lord will not dwell in an unclean tabernacle. When we worthily partake of the sacrament, we are promised that we will “always have his Spirit to be with [us].” To qualify for that promise we covenant that we will “always remember him” (D&C 20:77). Those who seek out and use pornography for sexual stimulation obviously violate that covenant. They also violate a sacred covenant to refrain from unholy and impure practices. They cannot have the Spirit of the Lord to be with them. All such need to heed the Apostle Peter’s plea: “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee” (Acts 8:22).

Brethren, you have noticed that I am not discussing the effects of pornography on mental health or criminal behavior. I am discussing its effects on spirituality—on our ability to have the companionship of the Spirit of the Lord and our capacity to exercise the power of the priesthood.

Effects of pornography on relationships

Pornography also inflicts mortal wounds on our most precious personal re-

lationships. In his talk to men of the priesthood last October, President Hinckley quoted the letter of a woman who asked him to warn Church members that pornography “has the effect of damaging hearts and souls to their very depths, strangling the life out of relationships” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2004, 64; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 60).

At a recent stake conference a woman handed me a similar letter. Her husband had also served in important Church callings for many years while addicted to pornography. She told of great difficulty in getting priesthood leaders to take this problem of pornography seriously:

“I got all kinds of responses—like I was overreacting or it was my fault. The bishop we have now has been great. And now after 15 years my husband is trying to deal with his addiction, but now it is 15 years harder to quit for him, and the loss has been incalculable.”

Pornography impairs one’s ability to enjoy a normal emotional, romantic, and spiritual relationship with a person of the opposite sex. It erodes the moral barriers that stand against inappropriate, abnormal, or illegal behavior. As conscience is desensitized, patrons of pornography are led to act out what they have witnessed, regardless of its effects on their life and the lives of others.

Addictive nature of pornography

Pornography is also addictive. It impairs decision-making capacities and it “hooks” its users, drawing them back obsessively for more and more. A man who had been addicted to pornography and to hard drugs wrote me this comparison: “In my eyes, cocaine doesn’t hold a candle to this. I have done both. . . . Quitting even the hardest drugs was nothing compared to [trying to quit pornography]” (letter of Mar. 20, 2005).

Pornography causes Spirit to withdraw

Some seek to justify their indulgence by arguing that they are only viewing “soft,” not “hard,” porn. A wise bishop called this refusing to see evil as evil. He quoted men seeking to justify their viewing choices by comparisons such as “not as bad as” or “only one bad scene.” But the test of what is evil is not its degree but its effect. When persons entertain evil thoughts long enough for the Spirit to withdraw, they lose their spiritual protection and are subject to the power and direction of the evil one. When they use Internet or other pornography for what this bishop described as “arousal on demand” (letter of Mar. 13, 2005), they are deeply soiled by sin.

King Benjamin’s great sermon describes the terrible consequences. When we withdraw from the Spirit of the Lord, we become an enemy to righteousness, we have a lively sense of our guilt, and we “shrink from the presence of the Lord” (see Mosiah 2:36–38). “Mercy hath no claim on that man,” he concluded; “therefore his final doom is to endure a never-ending torment” (v. 39).

Consider the tragic example of King David. Though a spiritual giant in Israel, he allowed himself to look upon something he should not have viewed (see 2 Samuel II). Tempted by what he saw, he violated two of the Ten Commandments, beginning with “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14). In this way a prophet-king fell from his exaltation (see D&C 132:39).

Being cleansed by repentance

But the good news is that no one needs to follow the evil, downward descent to torment. Everyone caught on that terrible escalator has the key to reverse his course. He can escape. Through repentance he can be clean.

Alma the Younger described it:

“Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell. . . .

“ . . . The very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror. . . .

“And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

“Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

“And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

“And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!” (Alma 36:13–14, 17–20).

Overcoming the addiction or temptation

My brethren who are caught in this addiction or troubled by this temptation, there is a way.

First, acknowledge the evil. Don’t defend it or try to justify yourself. For at least a quarter century our leaders have pleaded with men, and also with women and children, to avoid this evil.² Our Church magazines are full of warnings, information, and helps on this subject, with more than a score of articles published or to be published this year and last year alone.³

Second, seek the help of the Lord and His servants. Hear and heed President Hinckley’s words:

“Plead with the Lord out of the depths of your soul that He will remove from you the addiction which enslaves you. And may you have the courage to seek the loving guidance of your bishop and, if necessary, the counsel of caring professionals” (in Conference Report, Oct. 2004, 66; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 62).

Third, do all that you can to avoid pornography. If you ever find yourself in its presence—which can happen to anyone in the world in which we live—follow the example of Joseph of Egypt. When temptation caught him in her grip, he left temptation and “got him out” (Genesis 39:12).

Don’t accommodate any degree of temptation. Prevent sin and avoid having to deal with its inevitable destruction. So turn it off! Look away! Avoid it at all costs. Direct your thoughts in wholesome paths. Remember your covenants and be faithful in temple attendance. The wise bishop I quoted earlier reported that “an endowed priesthood bearer’s fall into pornography *never* occurs during periods of regular worship in the temple; it happens when he has become casual in his temple worship” (letter of Mar. 13, 2005).

We must also act to protect those we love. Parents install alarms to warn if their household is threatened by smoke or carbon monoxide. We should also install protections against spiritual threats, protections like filters on Internet connections and locating access so others can see what is being viewed. And we should build the spiritual strength of our families by loving relationships, family prayer, and scripture study.

Finally, do not patronize pornography. Do not use your purchasing power to support moral degradation. And young women, please understand that if you dress immod-

estly, you are magnifying this problem by becoming pornography to some of the men who see you.

Please heed these warnings. Let us all improve our personal behavior and redouble our efforts to protect our loved ones and our environment from the onslaught of pornography that threatens our spirituality, our marriages, and our children.

I testify that this is what we should do to enjoy the blessings of Him whom we worship. I testify of Jesus Christ, the Light and Life of the World, whose Church this is, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. *Challenges for the Year Ahead* (pamphlet, 1974), 4–5; reprinted in “Things They’re Saying,” *New Era*, Feb. 1974, 18.
2. See, for example, Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, Oct. 2004, 63–67; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 59–62; David E. Sorenson, in Conference Report, Apr. 2001, 53–56; or *Ensign*, May 2001, 41–42; Thomas S. Monson, in Conference Report, Oct. 1979, 95–98; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 66–67; David B. Haight, in Conference Report, Oct. 1984, 87–91; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1984, 70–73.
3. See, for example, Rory C. Reid, “The Road Back: Abandoning Pornography,” *Ensign*, Feb. 2005, 46–51; Arianne B. Cope, “Internet Café,” *New Era*, Mar. 2005, 34–37; Nycole S. Larsen, “The Decision,” *Friend*, Mar. 2004, 40–41.

Elder Robert J. Whetten

Strengthen thy brethren

Responding to the question, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus answered: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two

commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”¹

To ancient Israel and down through the generations of time, His prophets past and present have always taught this all-encompassing eternal truth—that to inherit eternal life we must have love in our souls: love for God our Eternal Father and love for our fellowmen.

In the closing hours of His earthly ministry, Jesus said to Peter, “But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”²

Peter had a testimony, borne of the Spirit, of the divinity of Jesus Christ. Peter knew, and his knowledge came by revelation. But his conversion, the change in his whole way of life and the nature of his very being, was more evident after the day of Pentecost, after receiving the heart-changing gift and witness of the Holy Ghost.

Be God’s instrument for blessing others

Yes, brothers and sisters, like Peter before, we have testimonies, but is conversion a continuing process in your life? Isn’t each of us a work in progress in the hands of our Maker? Is God blessing others through you? Do you pray and ask whom the Lord would have you bless by lifting another’s burden? Do you love others as much as you love yourself?

When Jesus told the lawyer that in order to inherit eternal life he must love his neighbor as himself, the lawyer said unto Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” Jesus responded with His parable of the good Samaritan and then asked: “Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him.”³ With this parable, Jesus taught that each of us should exhibit an active love and benevolence toward every one of His Father’s children.

King Benjamin taught the Saints of his day: “For the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, . . . I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, . . . such as feeding the hungry, . . . visiting the sick and administering to their relief, both *spiritually and temporally*.”⁴ Do you administer spiritual or temporal relief to those who need it? Do you reach out and strengthen the faith of

those coming into the fold, as asked by the prophets of our day?

Serving others is a measure of conversion

Conversion means consecrating your life to caring for and serving others who need your help and sharing your gifts and blessings. The Lord didn’t say, “Tend my sheep when it is convenient or watch my sheep when you aren’t busy.” He said, “Feed my sheep and my lambs; help them survive this world; keep them close to you. Lead them to safety—the safety of righteous choices that will prepare them for eternal life.”⁵

Every unselfish act of kindness and service increases your spirituality. God would use you to bless others. Your continued spiritual growth and eternal progress are very much wrapped up in your relationships—in how you treat others. Do you indeed love others and become a blessing in their lives? *Isn’t the measure of the level of your conversion how you treat others?* The person who does only those things in the Church that concern himself alone will never reach the goal of perfection. Service to others is what the gospel and exalted life are all about.

In your journey through life, you are to reach out and bless the lives of your fellow travelers, to give of yourself to those who need you. “For whosoever will save his life,” the Master said, “shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.”⁶

Make the gospel a living reality

James directed his epistle “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.”⁷ His teachings may be applied to us, the Lord’s people who in a latter day would accept the restored gospel. He teaches principles that should guide your relationships with other members of the Church. He considers the commandment to “love thy neighbour as thyself” to be the “royal law.”⁸ To James, a

testimony alone is not enough. The gospel has to become a living reality in your life. "And I will shew thee my faith by my works."⁹ "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only."¹⁰ James's definition of the converted is, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."¹¹ He ends his brief epistle with these words:

"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul . . . and shall hide a multitude of sins."¹²

By reclaiming an errant brother, you save both him and yourself. Your sins are hidden or remitted because you ministered for the salvation of another.

No more strangers and foreigners

Mine has been the great blessing of living my life in Latin America and witnessing firsthand the unfolding of the prophecies and promises made by His prophets and the Lord Himself.

"I shall gather in, from their long dispersion, my people, O house of Israel, and shall establish again among them my Zion. . . .

" . . . I will establish my church among them, and they shall come in unto the covenant and be numbered among this the remnant of Jacob, unto whom I have given this land for their inheritance."¹³

Literally hundreds of thousands have been gathered in from practically every nation in Latin America. Prophecies assure us that this growth will continue. Growth is our greatest challenge but also the greatest opportunity for each of us.

The Apostle Paul said to the new members in his day, "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."¹⁴

It seems that where the Church has experienced rapid growth, too many are still

made to feel that they are *strangers and foreigners* and have been left by the wayside. If we are to see the promises fulfilled, we must do as Moroni described:

"And after they had been received unto baptism, . . . they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ; and their names were taken, that they might be remembered and nourished . . . to keep them in the right way."¹⁵

Helping others come back

Many active members believe that the less-active members and new converts who fall by the wayside behave differently because they don't believe the Church's doctrine. Studies made do not support this assumption. They show that almost all less-active members interviewed believe that God exists, that Jesus is the Christ, that Joseph Smith was a prophet, and that the Church is true.

In numerous wards and branches there are many good, upright, honest men and women who just don't know how to come back to church. There are good mothers and fathers among them. They have just left, and no one has come to check up on them, leaving them with the idea that no one really cares. When men or women of faith visit these individuals and become their friends, strengthen them, pray with them, and teach them the gospel, they and their families will come back. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."¹⁶ Who are "the least of these my brethren"? Might the Lord be referring to the newest coming into the fold or to those who have wandered into the shadows of inactivity and would return if extended the hand of true fellowship?

Strengthening new members

In this great battle for the souls of men, the rules of engagement in missionary work are more clearly defined for each of us. Members are to accompany full-time mis-

sionary companionships as they teach the lessons and play a vital role in the conversion process of others. Missionaries are “to preach my gospel by the Spirit”¹⁷ with words from their own hearts, words of truth treasured up by much study and prayer. Our missionaries’ roles in the continuing conversion process of others do not end at baptism. They are to continue to teach new members and others who need spiritual nourishment.

Recent letters from the First Presidency remind priesthood leaders of their responsibility to strengthen and support new members. “Fellowship should be extended by all in the ward. . . . Home teachers and visiting teachers can play a valuable role.” New members should be given “opportunities . . . to serve and contribute to the strength of the ward.”¹⁸

Loving others strengthens conversion

Brothers and sisters, if the conversion and transformation process is to continue in each of us, new members and old alike, we must love, serve, and give spiritual nourishment to others. We must help others receive the full blessings of the Restoration, including the blessings of the temple.

The Prophet Joseph Smith wrote a letter to the Saints in his day: “Dear Brethren:—It is a duty which every Saint ought to render to his brethren freely—to always love them, and ever succor them. To be justified before God we must love one another: . . . we can love our neighbor as ourselves, and be faithful in tribulation.”¹⁹

Our own prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, has said, “I would hope, I would pray, that each of us . . . would resolve to seek those who need help . . . and lift them in the spirit of love into the embrace of the Church, where strong hands and loving hearts will warm them, comfort them, sustain them, and put them on the way of happy and productive lives.”²⁰

Love is not just a word or a declaration, but the first and great commandment, a commandment that demands action—“If ye love me, keep my commandments”²¹ and “Lovest thou me? . . . Feed my sheep.”²²

You must do what our Savior and His prophets, both past and present, have always taught: serve, strengthen the faith, and nurture those who need your love and blessing. You have the Lord’s promise: “And whoso receiveth you, there I will be also, for I will go before your face . . . , and my Spirit shall be in your hearts.”²³

Brothers and sisters, as you reach out in love to bless the life of another, you both will be blessed with His Spirit. The Lord teaches that both will “understand one another, and both [will be] edified and rejoice together.”²⁴

It is my prayer that our Heavenly Father will bless each of us with that love for others “which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son.”²⁵ I bear witness that His Son, Jesus Christ, lives and that His gospel is a gospel of love. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. Matthew 22:36–40.
2. Luke 22:32.
3. Luke 10:29, 36–37.
4. Mosiah 4:26; italics added.
5. See John 21:15–16.
6. Mark 8:35.
7. James 1:1.
8. James 2:8.
9. James 2:18.
10. James 1:22.
11. James 1:27.
12. James 5:19–20.
13. 3 Nephi 21:1, 22.
14. Ephesians 2:19.
15. Moroni 6:4.
16. Matthew 25:40.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 50:14.
18. First Presidency letter, Dec. 22, 2004; see also First Presidency letter, Feb. 11, 2005.
19. *History of the Church*, 2:229.

20. "Reach with a Rescuing Hand," *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 86.
21. John 14:15.
22. John 21:17.
23. Doctrine and Covenants 84:88.
24. Doctrine and Covenants 50:22.
25. Moroni 7:48.

President Monson

Thank you, Elder Perry, Elder Oaks, and Elder Whetten.

The choir and congregation will now sing "Do What Is Right." Elders Adhemar Damiani and Stephen B. Oveson of the Seventy will then address us. Following their remarks, we shall hear from Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

The choir and congregation sang "Do What Is Right."

Elder Adhemar Damiani

Be of good cheer

How can we find peace in this world? How can we endure to the end? How can we overcome the difficulties and trials we are facing?

The Savior Jesus Christ said: "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."¹

As part of our mortal probation, we pass through affliction, pain, and disappointment. Only in Jesus Christ can we find peace. He can help us to be of good cheer and to overcome all the challenges of this life.

What does it mean to be of good cheer? It means having hope, not getting discouraged, not losing faith, and living life joyfully. "Men are, that they might have joy."² It means facing life with confidence.

The gospel of Jesus Christ gives us the strength and the eternal perspective to face what is coming with good cheer. We must, however, not underestimate the difficulties that are prophesied for our day.

What are some of these difficulties? How can we face them?

Some of these difficulties are lack of hope, lack of love, and lack of peace.

Overcoming lack of hope

The prophet Moroni taught, "If ye have no hope ye must needs be in despair; and despair cometh because of iniquity."³ For many, the coming years may be years of despair. The greater the iniquity, the greater the despair will be.

The Savior said, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold."⁴ As iniquity increases, true love disappears. As a result, fear, insecurity, and despair grow!

To the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord said:

"I . . . will that all men shall know that the day speedily cometh . . . when peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion.

"And also the Lord shall have power over his saints, and shall reign in their midst."⁵

We live in a time when peace has been taken from the earth.

On the other hand, we live in a glorious time, a time when the Lord has restored His priesthood. The true gospel has been restored. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the kingdom of God on earth! We are helping to prepare the earth for the time when the Lord Jesus Christ will come and personally reign.

Purposes of trials

Why must we pass through trials in this life?

The Lord makes no secret that He will test our faith and our obedience. “We will prove them herewith,” He said, “to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them.”⁶

We learn from the book of Ecclesiastes: “All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; . . . as is the good, so is the sinner. . . . There is one event unto all.”⁷ Tempests may occur in the life of the man who built his life upon the rock of the gospel, as well as in the life of the foolish who built his life upon the things of this world.⁸

Reacting to trials

How should we react to these trials?

The Lord has said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”⁹ Each day we must take up our cross and press forward—and not just linger on the sidelines of our eternal journey.

How can we know whether we are being tried or whether the Lord is punishing us?

Trials are opportunities for our growth. The Lord said, “My people must be tried in all things, that they may be prepared to receive the glory that I have for them, even the glory of Zion; and he that will not bear chastisement is not worthy of my kingdom.”¹⁰

When we are being tried, we should ponder and ask, “What does the Lord want me to do in this situation?”

The Lord spoke these comforting words to the Prophet Joseph Smith: “Know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?”¹¹ We need to view each trial as an opportunity

for growth. Someday we will understand the *why*.

The Lord has said, “Whom I love I also chasten that their sins may be forgiven, for with the chastisement I prepare a way for their deliverance.”¹² The Lord loves each one of us. He wants us to be happy. This happiness comes by our faith in Jesus Christ, by our sincere and true repentance, by our obedience to His commandments, and by our endurance to the end.

The Lord helps ease our burdens

Sometimes we might think that the Lord does not hear or answer our prayers. At such times we need to stop and ponder what we have done throughout our lives. If necessary we must put our lives in harmony with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Lord revealed:

“I, the Lord, have suffered the affliction to come upon them, wherewith they have been afflicted, in consequence of their transgressions. . . .

“They were slow to hearken unto the voice of the Lord their God; therefore, the Lord their God is slow to hearken unto their prayers, to answer them in the day of their trouble.

“In the day of their peace they esteemed lightly my counsel; but, in the day of their trouble, of necessity they feel after me.”¹³

When we have the sincere desire to put our lives in harmony with the will of the Lord, He will always be ready to help ease our burdens.

Faith gives hope and strength to endure

What destroys our good cheer and our hope?

Jesus Christ told the Twelve Apostles some of the things that can destroy our hope and make us give up: allowing ourselves to fall into temptation; not enduring affliction, tribulation, and persecution;

fearing “the cares” of the world; seeking wealth first; giving up instead of enduring to the end; and allowing false prophets to deceive us.¹⁴

What gives us courage and hope?

The Lord’s invitation to each of us is “come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”¹⁵ Jesus Christ has the power to give us rest from our pain and suffering.

The prophet Mormon taught:

“Wherefore, if a man have faith he must needs have hope; for without faith there cannot be any hope. . . .

“ . . . And if a man be meek and lowly in heart, and confesses by the power of the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Christ, he must needs have charity.”¹⁶

If we daily exercise faith, meekness, charity, and lowliness in heart, confessing that Jesus is the Christ, and accepting His Atonement, we will be blessed with the strength and hope to face and overcome the trials and pains of this life.

The Lord will not forsake us

What are some of the Lord’s promises to each one of us?

“Be of good cheer, little children; for I am in your midst, and I have not forsaken you.”¹⁷

“Be of good cheer, for I will lead you along. The kingdom is yours and the blessings thereof are yours, and the riches of eternity are yours.”¹⁸

Quoting the words of the prophet Ether: “Wherefore, whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men.”¹⁹

God is our Father. We are His children. He loves us. He desires our happiness here in this life and for all eternity. We are led by a true prophet of God today. Jesus is the Christ. Through Him we can find peace in this world. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. John 16:33.
2. 2 Nephi 2:25.
3. Moroni 10:22.
4. Matthew 24:12.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 1:35–36.
6. Abraham 3:25.
7. Ecclesiastes 9:2–3.
8. See Matthew 7:24–27.
9. Luke 9:23.
10. Doctrine and Covenants 136:31.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 122:7–8.
12. Doctrine and Covenants 95:1.
13. Doctrine and Covenants 101:2, 7–8.
14. See Matthew 13:19–23.
15. Matthew 11:28.
16. Moroni 7:42, 44.
17. Doctrine and Covenants 61:36.
18. Doctrine and Covenants 78:18.
19. Ether 12:4.

Elder Stephen B. Oveson

My dear brothers and sisters, as we prepare to listen to President Gordon B. Hinckley’s closing remarks at the end of this marvelous general conference, I fervently hope that each of us will feel how blessed we are to have received from prophets and apostles of the Lord the collective wisdom and exhortation that, if heeded

and followed, will help us steer our course ever closer to our Savior. We ought to be particularly grateful to live in a time when our Church leaders, though many are advanced in years, continue to receive the revelation and inspiration that moves the kingdom forward from day to day.

Counsel from those who are bowed in years

As a young man I was given a very strong written admonition to prove myself a faithful and obedient son so that as I grew older and whenever I needed counsel and advice, I should go to my parents, though they be “bowed in years,” to receive from them wisdom, comfort, and guidance. My father passed away over 20 years ago, having been a great and exemplary source of wisdom for me all the days of my life, and we just laid my 101-year-old mother to rest beside her eternal companion last Monday. In her 100th year she affirmed her lifelong testimony in these words:

“The gospel is a way of life; it is part of the plan to help us avoid bitterness. More than ever, I believe that this life is good but that the next life is better” (in “Growing Old Graciously: Lessons from a Centenarian,” *Religious Educator* 5, no. 1 [2004], 11).

My mother often told me that she prayed for me and for our family every day. As she came closer and closer to the veil, her prayers were especially fervent and meaningful to me. Both of my parents, as well as my dear parents-in-law, endured or are enduring to the end in righteous paths, leaving a legacy of faithful dedication for all their posterity to follow.

President Ezra Taft Benson, in the November 1989 *Ensign*, is quoted as follows: “The Lord knows and loves the elderly among His people. It has always been so, and upon them He has bestowed many of His greatest responsibilities. In various dispensations He has guided His people through prophets who were in their advancing years. He has needed the wisdom and experience of age, the inspired direction from those with long years of proven faithfulness to His gospel” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1989, 3; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 4).

Teachings from prophets who waxed old

These thoughts have caused me to reflect on the great sermons, blessings, testimonies, and admonitions that prophets and apostles throughout the ages have left, especially as they felt themselves waxing old or preparing to go down to the dust. Some of these parting passages are among our most noteworthy and quoted scriptures.

From Old Testament times

For instance, in Moses 6:57, Enoch states unequivocally, “Wherefore teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell . . . in his presence.” These basic principles of the gospel were being taught from the time of Adam and Eve, passed down from generation to generation, as the scriptures attest, time and time again.

Joseph who was sold into Egypt left these words of counsel with the people of Israel: “I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” (Genesis 50:24).

Generations later, as the fulfillment of Joseph’s prophecy was about to be realized, Moses left his blessings with all the tribes of Israel and passed the mantle of leadership to Joshua, who led the people back into the promised land. As he was approaching his final days, Joshua left the immortal words to “choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).

Later prophets, such as Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Malachi, left equally indelible testimonies throughout their ministries, prophesying of the coming Messiah and His infinite Atonement.

From the Book of Mormon

We find a similar pattern throughout the Book of Mormon in the emphasis given to the final addresses of Nephi, Jacob, and King Benjamin—whose mighty discourse changed the hearts of an entire nation—not to mention the masterful words of Abinadi, who boldly spoke knowing full well that his days were numbered: “Teach them that redemption cometh through Christ the Lord, who is the very Eternal Father” (Mosiah 16:15). The list continues with Alma and his son Alma; also Helaman, the son of Helaman, who gave such priceless advice to his sons:

“And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation . . . , which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall” (Helaman 5:12).

These and other Book of Mormon prophets, including Mormon himself, wrote for our day, knowing that we would need their knowledge and wisdom to aid us in these perilous times. The Book of Mormon itself ends with the incomparable charge of Moroni, the son of Mormon, as he tells us:

“Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you” (Moroni 10:32).

From the New Testament

We have similar “last testimonies” in the New Testament, such as Paul’s grand statement: “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7), attesting to his having endured to the end.

We gain great insight into the growth of the mighty senior Apostle, Peter, in his statement: “And be clothed with humility:

for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:5–6).

And certainly the greatest personage of all time to learn from is the risen Lord Himself, as He charged His Apostles and followers to “go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:19–20).

Common inspirational threads

What a wealth of conviction and knowledge these collective scriptures give us. Can we find common inspirational threads running through each of them? I believe they are easily recognizable:

- That Christ, the Son of God, lives and is our Redeemer and Savior
- That we should follow Him and show our love for Him by remembering Him and humbly keeping His commandments
- That through His Atonement we are able to repent and be cleansed
- That we are His covenant people and should always keep the covenants that we have entered into
- That we need to spread His gospel throughout the world
- That we should have faith, repent, be baptized, receive the Holy Ghost, and endure to the end

From latter-day prophets

In our dispensation, modern-day prophets of the Restoration reiterate time and again these same principles. In the teachings of President John Taylor we learn that “as the Son of Man, He endured all that was possible for flesh and blood to endure; as the Son of God He triumphed

over all, and forever ascended to the right hand of God" (*The Mediation and Atonement* [1882], 151).

One of my favorites, from President Spencer W. Kimball:

"To the testimonies of these mighty men and apostles of old—our brethren in the ministry of the same Master—I add my own testimony. I know that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God and that he was crucified for the sins of the world.

"He is my friend, my Savior, my Lord, my God.

"With all my heart I pray that the Saints may . . . gain an eternal inheritance with him in celestial glory" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1978, 110; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1978, 73).

Our prophet today, President Gordon B. Hinckley, continues to lead us with his powerful convictions, as he declared in a recent stake conference address:

"I have a testimony, real, burning, and vital, of the truth of this work. I know that God our Eternal Father lives and that Jesus is the Christ, my Savior and my Redeemer. It is He who stands at the head of this Church. All I desire is that I go forward with this work as He would have it go

forward" ("Inspirational Thoughts," *Ensign*, Oct. 2003, 5).

Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith

Summarizing the testimonies of all the ancient and modern-day apostles and prophets are the immortal words of the Prophet Joseph Smith, who declared:

"And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!

"For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father" (D&C 76:22–23).

I wish to add my own humble affirmation of the truthfulness of the aforementioned testimonies. I know that our Heavenly Father is literally the Father of our spirits and that Jesus Christ is our Savior, our Redeemer, our Lord, and, as we obey His commandments, our friend (see John 15:14). As we study the scriptures, may we have added insights into and greater appreciation for the power of testimony, especially as it is borne by those of great wisdom and advanced age, is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Elder David A. Bednar

The tender mercies of the Lord

Six months ago I stood at this pulpit for the first time as the newest member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Both then and even more so now, I have felt and feel the weight of the call to serve and of the responsibility to teach with clarity and to testify with authority. I pray for and invite the assistance of the Holy Ghost as I now speak with you.

This afternoon I want to describe and discuss a spiritual impression I received a few moments before I stepped to this pulpit during the Sunday morning session of

general conference last October. Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf had just finished speaking and had declared his powerful witness of the Savior. Then we all stood together to sing the intermediate hymn that previously had been announced by President Gordon B. Hinckley. The intermediate hymn that morning was "Redeemer of Israel" (*Hymns*, no. 6).

Now, the music for the various conference sessions had been determined many weeks before—and obviously long before my new call to serve. If, however, I had been invited to suggest an intermediate hymn for that particular session of the con-

ference—a hymn that would have been both edifying and spiritually soothing for me and for the congregation before my first address in this Conference Center—I would have selected my favorite hymn, “Redeemer of Israel.” Tears filled my eyes as I stood with you to sing that stirring hymn of the Restoration.

Near the conclusion of the singing, to my mind came this verse from the Book of Mormon: “But behold, I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance” (1 Nephi 1:20).

My mind was drawn immediately to Nephi’s phrase “the tender mercies of the Lord,” and I knew in that very moment I was experiencing just such a tender mercy. A loving Savior was sending me a most personal and timely message of comfort and reassurance through a hymn selected weeks previously. Some may count this experience as simply a nice coincidence, but I testify that the tender mercies of the Lord are real and that they do not occur randomly or merely by coincidence. Often the Lord’s timing of His tender mercies helps us to both discern and acknowledge them.

What are the tender mercies of the Lord?

Since last October I have reflected repeatedly upon the phrase “the tender mercies of the Lord.” Through personal study, observation, pondering, and prayer, I believe I have come to better understand that the Lord’s tender mercies are the very personal and individualized blessings, strength, protection, assurances, guidance, loving-kindness, consolation, support, and spiritual gifts which we receive from and because of and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Truly the Lord suits “his mercies according to the conditions of the children of men” (D&C 46:15).

Recall how the Savior instructed His Apostles that He would not leave them

comfortless. Not only would He send “another Comforter” (John 14:16), even the Holy Ghost, but the Savior said that He would come to them (see John 14:18). Let me suggest that one of the ways whereby the Savior comes to each of us is through His abundant and tender mercies. For instance, as you and I face challenges and tests in our lives, the gift of faith and an appropriate sense of personal confidence that reaches beyond our own capacity are two examples of the tender mercies of the Lord. Repentance and forgiveness of sins and peace of conscience are examples of the tender mercies of the Lord. And the persistence and the fortitude that enable us to press forward with cheerfulness through physical limitations and spiritual difficulties are examples of the tender mercies of the Lord.

A sister feels the Lord’s tender mercies

In a recent stake conference, the tender mercies of the Lord were evident in the touching testimony of a young wife and mother of four whose husband was slain in Iraq in December of 2003. This stalwart sister recounted how, after being notified of her husband’s death, she received his Christmas card and message. In the midst of the abrupt reality of a dramatically altered life came to this good sister a timely and tender reminder that indeed families can be together forever. With permission I quote from that Christmas card:

“To the best family in the world! Have a great time together and remember the true meaning of Christmas! The Lord has made it possible for us to be together forever. So even when we are apart, we will still be together as a family.

“God bless and keep y’all safe and grant this Christmas to be our gift of love from us to Him above!!!

“All my love, Daddy and your loving husband!”

Clearly, the husband’s reference to being apart in his Christmas greeting referred

to the separation caused by his military assignment. But to this sister, as a voice from the dust from a departed eternal companion and father, came a most needed spiritual reassurance and witness. As I indicated earlier, the Lord's tender mercies do not occur randomly or merely by coincidence. Faithfulness, obedience, and humility invite tender mercies into our lives, and it is often the Lord's timing that enables us to recognize and treasure these important blessings.

Receiving tender mercies through a leader

Some time ago I spoke with a priesthood leader who was prompted to memorize the names of all of the youth ages 13 to 21 in his stake. Using snapshots of the young men and women, he created flash cards that he reviewed while traveling on business and at other times. This priesthood leader quickly learned all the names of the youth.

One night the priesthood leader had a dream about one of the young men whom he knew only from a picture. In the dream he saw the young man dressed in a white shirt and wearing a missionary name tag. With a companion seated at his side, the young man was teaching a family. The young man held the Book of Mormon in his hand, and he looked as if he were testifying of the truthfulness of the book. The priesthood leader then awoke from his dream.

At an ensuing priesthood gathering, the leader approached the young man he had seen in his dream and asked to talk with him for a few minutes. After a brief introduction, the leader called the young man by name and said:

"I am not a dreamer. I have never had a dream about a single member of this stake, except for you. I am going to tell you about my dream, and then I would like you to help me understand what it means."

The priesthood leader recounted the dream and asked the young man about its

meaning. Choking with emotion, the young man simply replied, "It means God knows who I am." The remainder of the conversation between this young man and his priesthood leader was most meaningful, and they agreed to meet and counsel together from time to time during the following months.

That young man received the Lord's tender mercies through an inspired priesthood leader. I repeat again, the Lord's tender mercies do not occur randomly or merely by coincidence. Faithfulness and obedience enable us to receive these important gifts and, frequently, the Lord's timing helps us to recognize them.

Tender mercies fortify and protect us

We should not underestimate or overlook the power of the Lord's tender mercies. The simpleness, the sweetness, and the constancy of the tender mercies of the Lord will do much to fortify and protect us in the troubled times in which we do now and will yet live. When words cannot provide the solace we need or express the joy we feel, when it is simply futile to attempt to explain that which is unexplainable, when logic and reason cannot yield adequate understanding about the injustices and inequities of life, when mortal experience and evaluation are insufficient to produce a desired outcome, and when it seems that perhaps we are so totally alone, truly we are blessed by the tender mercies of the Lord and made mighty even unto the power of deliverance (see 1 Nephi 1:20).

Who are they whom the Lord has chosen to receive His tender mercies?

Our hearts determine whether we are chosen

The word *chosen* in 1 Nephi 1:20 is central to understanding the concept of the Lord's tender mercies. The dictionary indicates that *chosen* suggests one who is selected, taken by preference, or picked out. It also can be used to refer to the elect or

chosen of God (see *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, second ed. [1989], “Chosen”).

Some individuals who hear or read this message erroneously may discount or dismiss in their personal lives the availability of the tender mercies of the Lord, believing that “I certainly am not one who has been or ever will be chosen.” We may falsely think that such blessings and gifts are reserved for other people who appear to be more righteous or who serve in visible Church callings. I testify that the tender mercies of the Lord are available to all of us and that the Redeemer of Israel is eager to bestow such gifts upon us.

To be or to become chosen is not an exclusive status conferred upon us. Rather, you and I ultimately determine if we are chosen. Please now note the use of the word *chosen* in the following verses from the Doctrine and Covenants:

“Behold, there are many called, but few are *chosen*. And why are they not *chosen*?

“Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men” (D&C 121:34–35; italics added).

I believe the implication of these verses is quite straightforward. God does not have a list of favorites to which we must hope our names will someday be added. He does not limit “the chosen” to a restricted few. Rather, it is *our* hearts and *our* aspirations and *our* obedience which definitively determine whether we are counted as one of God’s chosen.

Enoch was instructed by the Lord on this very point of doctrine. Please note the use of the word *choose* in these verses:

“Behold these thy brethren; they are the workmanship of mine own hands, and I gave unto them their knowledge, in the day I created them; and in the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency;

“And unto thy brethren have I said, and also given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they

should *choose* me, their Father” (Moses 7:32–33; italics added).

As we learn in these scriptures, the fundamental purposes for the gift of agency were to love one another and to choose God. Thus we become God’s chosen and invite His tender mercies as we use our agency to choose God.

The Father’s work—and our work

One of the most well-known and frequently cited passages of scripture is found in Moses 1:39. This verse clearly and concisely describes the work of the Eternal Father: “For behold, this is *my work* and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (italics added).

A companion scripture found in the Doctrine and Covenants describes with equal clarity and conciseness our primary work as the sons and daughters of the Eternal Father. Interestingly, this verse does not seem to be as well known and is not quoted with great frequency. “Behold, this is *your work*, to keep my commandments, yea, with all your might, mind and strength” (D&C 11:20; italics added).

Thus, the Father’s work is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of His children. Our work is to keep His commandments with all of our might, mind, and strength—and we thereby become chosen and, through the Holy Ghost, receive and recognize the tender mercies of the Lord in our daily lives.

Conference is a tender mercy

The very conference in which we are participating this weekend is yet another example of the Lord’s tender mercies. We have been blessed to receive inspired counsel from the leaders of the Savior’s Church—timely counsel for our day and for our circumstances and for our challenges. We have been instructed, lifted, edified, called to repentance, and strengthened. The spirit of this conference has fortified our faith

and fueled our desire to repent, to obey, to improve, and to serve. Like you, I am eager to now act upon the reminders, counsel, and personal inspiration with which we have been blessed during this conference. And in just a few moments each of us will receive one of the Lord's tender mercies as we hear the concluding remarks and testimony of President Gordon B. Hinckley. Truly "the Lord is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works" (Psalm 145:9).

Tender mercies are available to all

I am thankful for the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ through the Prophet Joseph Smith and for the knowledge we have today about the Lord's tender mercies. Our desires, faithfulness, and obedience invite and help us to discern His mercies in our lives. As one of His servants, I declare my witness that Jesus is the Christ, our Redeemer and our Savior. I know that He lives and that His tender mercies are available to all of us. Each of us can have eyes to see clearly and ears

to hear distinctly the tender mercies of the Lord as they strengthen and assist us in these latter days. May our hearts always be filled with gratitude for His abundant and tender mercies. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

Thank you, brethren. Brothers and sisters, as we conclude the conference, we express appreciation to the Tabernacle Choir, the combined choir from the Ogden and Logan Utah Institutes, and the priesthood choir from Brigham Young University for the beautiful and inspiring music. We also extend our thanks to all who participated in any of these proceedings.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, our beloved prophet, will be our concluding speaker at this session, and following President Hinckley's remarks, the choir will favor us with "Sing We Now at Parting." The benediction will be offered by Elder William W. Parmley of the Seventy, and this conference will then be adjourned for six months.

President Gordon B. Hinckley

Strengthened faith and testimonies

My beloved brethren and sisters, we have had a wonderful conference. The Spirit of the Lord has been with us. We have been taught many truths. Our testimonies have been strengthened, our faith quickened.

Through the miracle—and it is a miracle—of modern technology, these proceedings have been broadcast worldwide. Ninety-five percent of the membership of the Church in all the world could have participated with us.

It has been a time for the renewal of our faith in the great eternal verities which have come to us through the instrumentality of the Prophet Joseph. How blessed we

are. How fortunate we are in our knowledge of these transcendent truths.

Reach out with love and concern

But may I say, as I have said in the past, our membership in this Church, with eligibility for all of the blessings that flow therefrom, should never be any cause for self-righteousness, for arrogance, for denigration of others, for looking down upon others. All mankind is our neighbor. When asked which was the greatest commandment of the law, the Lord said:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. . . .

“[And] thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:37, 39).

Regardless of the color of our skin, of the shape of our eyes, of the language we speak, we all are sons and daughters of God and must reach out to one another with love and concern.

Wherever we may live, we can be friendly neighbors. Our children can mingle with the children of those not of this Church and remain steadfast if they are properly taught. They can even become missionaries to their associates.

Commendation of youth

We commend our wonderful youth, who for the most part stand up to the evils of the world, who push these evils aside and live lives pleasing to the Lord. We constantly pray that their parents will likewise live worthily in every respect.

Blessings of temple attendance

We repeat what we have said before: make a habit of going to the house of the Lord. There is no better way to ensure proper living than temple attendance. It will crowd out the evils of pornography, substance abuse, and spiritual atrophy. It will strengthen marriage and family relations.

Humanitarian efforts bless countless lives

Now, as a Church we have worked with others in lifting the sorrow and sufferings of those who are in distress. Our humanitarian efforts have literally blessed the lives of countless thousands not of our faith. In the terrible tsunami disaster, and in other disasters incident to conflict, disease, and hunger, we have done a great and marvelous work assisting others without worrying about who gets the credit.

In February of this year the president of the American Red Cross presented to the Church the Circle of Humanitarians Award, which is the highest honor given

by them. It is in recognition of the effort of the Church to extend the vaccination against measles to thousands and thousands of young people.

Likewise, Rotary International has recognized the Church for a contribution to bring about the eradication of polio in third-world countries where it still exists.

Countless lives have been saved, and much pain and misery have been avoided throughout their lives.

To the extent made possible by resources which come from the generosity of our people, we are reaching down to lift those in distress.

Surely the Lord is blessing us as a people, and we must reach out to bless His needy wherever they may be.

Blessing and testimony

Now, as we leave for our homes, I invoke the blessings of heaven upon you. Be faithful to the commandments of the Lord, and He will open the windows of heaven and shower down blessings upon you. I leave with you my benediction and my love. I leave with you my witness and my testimony that God our Eternal Father lives, that He is personal and real, that He is indeed our Father, that He listens to and will answer prayer. I give you my witness that Jesus is the Christ, the Redeemer of the world, the only name under heaven whereby we may be saved, and I leave you my witness and my testimony that God and the Lord Jesus spoke in person to the boy Joseph and opened the curtains ushering in this great and final dispensation.

God bless you, my beloved brothers and sisters. Peace be with you now and always is my humble prayer in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang “Sing We Now at Parting.”

Elder William W. Parmley offered the benediction.

SUMMARY OF CONFERENCE MUSIC

The Tabernacle Choir provided the music for the Saturday morning, Sunday morning, and Sunday afternoon sessions. Craig Jessop and Mack Wilberg directed the choir. John Longhurst, Clay Christiansen, Richard Elliott, and Linda Margetts were the organists.

A combined choir from the Ogden and Logan Utah Institutes provided music for the Saturday afternoon session. Jonathan G. Woodstock, Jerald F. Simon, and Brent T. Cottle directed the choir, and Bonnie Goodliffe was the organist.

A priesthood choir from Brigham Young University provided music for the priesthood session. Ronald J. Staheli directed the choir, and Clay Christiansen was the organist.

Throughout the conference sessions, prelude, postlude, and interlude music and accompaniments on the organ were played by John Longhurst, Clay Christiansen, Richard Elliott, Linda Margetts, and Bonnie Goodliffe.

F. Michael Watson

Clerk of the Conference

INDEX

A

Aaronic Priesthood: restoration of, 47; authority of, 52. *See also* Priesthood; Youth

Activation. *See* Less-active members

Adversary: wants us to become complacent, 19; persuades men to do evil, 50; power of, is not comparable with that of Savior, 50; is working overtime to influence youth, 71–72

Adversity: stories of families dealing with death, 15, 21–22, 105–6; faith and obedience are the best response to, 75; the Lord has special compassion for those who suffer, 75; the Atonement brings strength during, 75–76; purpose of, is to test faith and obedience, 100; may be necessary as loving chastisement, 100

Agency: we must use, to prove our worthiness, 86; a fundamental purpose of, is to love one another and choose God, 107

Ancestors: importance of learning stories about, 21; necessity of performing temple ordinances for, 22. *See also* Family history

Andersen, Neil L., 49

Apostasy: story of the effects of, on posterity, 33–34; no valid priesthood authority during, 84; Christian reformers tried to correct errors resulting from, 89

Atonement (of Jesus): life and teachings of Joseph Smith bring greater understanding of, 11; makes resurrection a reality and eternal life a possibility for all, 17; faith in and testimony of, are a gift, 40; young men should understand and appreciate, 71; brings strength during trials, 75–76; Jesus Christ suffered all things as part of, 75, 103; makes possible cleansing at baptism, 79; is the pattern for proxy work in temples, 85. *See also* Jesus Christ

Auditing Department Report, 25

B

Ballard, M. Russell, 70

Baptism: efforts of missionaries and leaders help individuals keep commitments after, 31; cleansing comes from, 79; is a covenant between God and man for the remission of sins, 85; at the age of accountability, 85; by immersion, is symbolic of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, 85; missionaries to continue teaching new members after, 98

Bednar, David A., 104

Bishops: help the poor by teaching them the law of tithing, 37; challenged to recommend more couple missionaries, 43; requested to prepare at least one more young man for missionary service, 72–73

Body: show reverent respect for, 17

Book of Mormon: is available in 106 languages, 3, 84; is the keystone of our religion, 5; account of Boyd K. Packer receiving a witness of, 5; explains the workings of the Holy Ghost, 5; central purpose of, is to testify of Jesus Christ, 8, 84; is a treasure of wisdom and inspiration, 8; with other scriptures, provides a witness and defense of Joseph Smith, 8–9; is tangible evidence of the Restoration, 11, 71; is among the 20 most influential books ever published in America, 84

C

Callings: perseverance in, leads to great opportunities and blessings, 55; diligence in priesthood, is a lifelong requirement, 57; we should magnify, 59. *See also* Service

Charity. *See* Love

Children: suffering of, in recent world disasters, 12; need to be taught the gospel of Jesus Christ, 13; helping, learn what matters most, 12–13; follow Jesus's example in teaching, 13; need to experience the Light of Christ, 13–14; the gospel brings peace to, 14; special message to, 14–15; tragedy follows criticism of a paperboy, 22; 40-year absence from Church follows unkind words of an angry teacher, 27; Joseph Smith's kindness

to, 28; righteous, help families remain faithful, 34; innocence of little, revealed through Joseph Smith, 85. *See also* Family; Parents; Youth

Church: growth of, 3–4; future of, 4; call for greater understanding of the mission of, 4; 175th anniversary of, 8; sealing families in temples is a purpose of the restoration of, 16; is a place for imperfect people to support and serve each other, 28; name of, came by revelation, 85; requires constant revelation, 86; is the answer to spiritual apathy of worldly societies, 88–91; Reformation preceded the restoration of, 89; we must seek the Savior through, 89; is built up one conversion, testimony, and baptism at a time, 91

Comforter. *See* Holy Ghost

Consecration: missionary work demands, 71; and conversion, 96

Conversion: degree of, is measured by acts of consecration, kindness, and service, 96

Converts. *See* New members

Covenants: conferral of Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods imposes, of obedience and service, 52; review baptismal, priesthood, and temple, 54; teach youth about, 62; of the temple help secure holiness of character, 69; renewal of temple, increases happiness in the home, 69; through temple, God promises eternal glory to the faithful, 80; acceptance of, will free the dead from spirit prison, 82; use of pornography violates, 93

Criticism: does harm, 28; of other members weakens the Church, 29

D

Damiani, Adhemar, 99

Death: stories of families dealing with, 15, 21–22, 105–6; is important to God's plan, 17–18; those who are prepared do not fear, 18; the sting of, is soothed by faith, hope, and charity, 18

Debt: avoiding, 20; and home equity loans, 20

Duty: war in defense of liberty a, to God, 6; of priesthood holders, 59; to love and succor one another, 98

E

Endurance. *See* Perseverance

Edgley, Richard C., 9

Elderly: wisdom and counsel of, 102–4; bear great responsibilities in God's kingdom, 102–4

Evil: denigrating music describes almost every type of, 19; beware the, behind the smiling eyes, 49–51; comes from the devil, 50; is allowed a position of influence so that man may learn to act for himself, 50; discernment of, comes from following the counsel of parents, the prophet, and the Holy Ghost, 51; gambling is an, 65; pornography is an avalanche of, 91; the Spirit withdraws if we entertain, 94; of pornography, substance abuse, and spiritual atrophy, 109

Example: of the Savior in teaching children, 13; mothers teach by, 15; emulate the Lord's, of love, prayer, and endurance, 17

Eyring, Henry B., 79

F

Faith: walking by, 6; how to receive the gift of, 39–40; is a universal gift, 40; we show, through obedience, 54; holiness comes by, and obedience, 68; and obedience are the best answers to cares and suffering, 75, 100–101; and obedience enable us to receive the Lord's gifts, 106

Family: insights from the Book of Mormon about defending, 6; influence on, of one man who left the Church, 33–34; service of senior missionary couples blesses, 42–43; desire to be bound together forever as, 80–82; great truths about, revealed

through Joseph Smith, 85; represents the most sacred of all relationships, 85. *See also* Children; Family home evening; Fathers; Mothers; Parents

Family history: we cannot be made perfect without our family, 17; all families admonished to do, 21–22; the Holy Spirit will move Saints to do, and temple work, 69; begin, by doing simple things, 82

Family home evening: hold regular, 19–20

Father in Heaven. *See* God

Fathers: counsel to, 21; Clark Monson watches the example of his father, 22. *See also* Family; Parents

Faust, James E., 55, 67

First Vision: depicted in Zwickau chapel stained-glass window, 38–39; helps us believe in Christ, 40; blesses whole human family, 40; fruits of, 40. *See also* Smith, Joseph

Forgiveness: forgive offenses, 34; seek to fill wards and branches with the spirit of Zion, 78; is a tender mercy, 105. *See also* Repentance

Friendship: the importance of Christlike friends, 76–77; a father's example of, 77; in wards and branches fosters the spirit of Zion, 78; Joseph Smith is an exemplar of, 78; our ultimate, should be with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, 79

G

Gambling: is a growing evil, 63; often leads to other destructive practices, 63; poker leads to addiction to, 63–64; most people lose in, 64; bingo, state lotteries, and casinos on reservations, 64; Church Presidents and leaders have always denounced, 64–65; choose wholesome activities instead of, 65–66

Genealogy. *See* Family history

General Authorities present, 1

General priesthood session, 45

God: nature of, revealed in First Vision, 83–84; we are children of, 86; speaks today, 86; knows who we are, 106; chooses all who choose Him, 106–7

Gospel: is our foundation, 4; a professor's excitement for, 9; teach children the beauty and power of, 13; children need to be filled with the light of, 13; brings peace to children, 14; should become a living reality in our lives, 97

H

Hales, Robert D., 41

Heavenly Father. *See* God

Hinckley, Gordon B., 2, 62, 83, 108

Hillam, Harold G., 33

Holland, Jeffrey R., 46

Holy Ghost: we may know truth by the power of, 5; workings of, explained in the Book of Mormon, 5; can communicate through feelings, 5; will not be associated with unworthiness, 51; will warn of physical and spiritual dangers, 51; we receive and recognize Lord's tender mercies through power of, 107

Home. *See* Children; Family; Parents

Home teaching: a privileged priesthood calling, 57; story of a man who was a home teacher at age 100, 57; help fellowship new members, 98

Hope: the divine source of all, 40; of ancestors who need saving ordinances, 82; stories of finding new, 89–90; overcoming lack of, 99; faith gives us, 100–101

Hughes, Kathleen H., 76

Husbands. *See* Family; Marriage

I

Immodesty: magnifies societal problems of pornography, 95

Immorality: portrayed on television, 19; of today is similar to the times of Sodom

and Gomorrah, 54; of modern societies in emerging nations comes at high price, 88

Internet: poker games on, can lead to gambling addiction, 63–64; pornography on, 94; avoiding pornography on, by using filters, 95

J

Jesus Christ: Atonement of (*see* Atonement); Church of (*see* Church); faith in (*see* Faith); Light of (*see* Light of Christ); Second Coming of (*see* Second Coming); central purpose of the Book of Mormon is to testify of, 8; should be our example, 22; epitome of kindness and compassion, 27–28; Intercessory Prayer of, 40; all good comes from, 50; is a resurrected and perfect being, 50; conferred sealing powers of priesthood because of perfect love, 81; seek, through His Church, 89; gaining a testimony of, 89–90

K

Keys: without priesthood, there could be no Church, 46; bestowal of priesthood, by heavenly messengers, 47, 85; of apostleship, restored by Peter, James, and John, 47; of sealing power restored by Elijah, 47, 80–81; Gordon B. Hinckley holds all restored priesthood, 70

Kindness: reach out in, 3; fathers should demonstrate, 21; the virtue of, 27; of Jesus Christ, 27–28; of Joseph Smith, 28; in the home, 28; of James E. Talmage, 29; to those who are rude, obnoxious, or wayward, 29; be models of, 30; every act of, increases spirituality, 96

L

Less-active members: many are ready to return if given encouragement and guidance, 35; assisting, requires diligence and patience, 59; story of Thomas S. Monson assisting, 59–60; almost all, retain testimonies, 97; will return through friendship, prayer, and gospel instruction, 97

Light of Christ: children need to experience, 13–14; is as universal as sunlight, 71; parents, teachers, and leaders must kindle, in all youth, 71

Love: reach out with, to neighbors, 3, 98, 108; we better understand the Savior's, through Joseph Smith, 11; fathers counseled to demonstrate, 21; for those who are rude, obnoxious, or wayward, 29; is the foundation for missionary service, 31; of a stake president, 35; pray to feel the Lord's, 43; recognizing the Lord's, 77; serving in temple with family and friends fills hearts with, 79; of God and fellowmen, 95–97; loving others strengthens conversion, 98

M

Marriage: couple missionary service strengthens, 43; temple attendance strengthens, 69, 109; teaching the doctrine of eternal, should capture the interest of millions of couples, 85; pornography threatens, 95. *See also* Family

Melchizedek Priesthood: restoration of, 47, 85, 89; authority of, 52–53. *See also* Priesthood

Menlove, Coleen K., 12

Mercy: the tender mercies of the Lord, 104–8; a sister feels the Lord's, 105; of the Lord can be received through leaders, 106; fortifies and protects us, 106; who is chosen to receive, 106–7; is available to all, 108

Missionaries: implementation of *Preach My Gospel* is helping, 30–33; improved teaching of, 31–32; counsel for couple, 41–45; couple, plant a seed of service in their families, 44; learn leadership skills, 55; high standards for, 70–71; prepare every young man for, 71; the need for more, 72; find one more, 72–73; make service of, a tradition, 73–74; continue to teach new members, 98

Missionary work: use of *Preach My Gospel* in, 30–33; continues in the spirit world, 81

Monson, Thomas S., 19, 58

Mothers: counsel to, 20; many good, among the less active, 97. *See also* Family; Parents

Music: denigrating, describes every type of imaginable evil, 19

N

Nelson, Russell M., 15

New members: *Preach My Gospel* teaches keys to retention of, 33; invited to begin and persist in family history and temple work, 80–82; must be made to feel like fellowcitizens with Saints, 97; missionaries must continue to teach and all ward members fellowship, 97–98

O

Oaks, Dallin H., 91

Oaks, Robert C., 52

Obedience: the Savior's example of, 38; conferral of priesthood constitutes a covenant of, 52, 58; we show faith by, to basic commandments, 54; holiness comes from faith and, 68; faith and, are the best answer to cares and sorrows, 75; faith and, are tested by trials, 100; faith and, enable us to receive gifts from Lord, 106; determines who is chosen of God, 107

Oveson, Stephen B., 101

P

Packer, Boyd K., 5

Parents: need to teach children of the Lord, 12–13; should follow Jesus's example in teaching children, 13; counsel to, 20–21; responsibility of, to prepare sons for missions, 30, 71–72; the bar has been raised for, 72; counsel from aged, 102

Perpetual Education Fund: is assisting nearly 18,000 young people, 3

Perry, L. Tom, 87

Perseverance: is necessary to achieve potential, 55; Madame Curie's example of, 56; saves Lorenzo Snow's life, 56–57; of latter-day prophets, 57; in service, 57–58

Pornography: is corrosive filth, 54; is a growing problem, 91; do not minimize the seriousness of, 92; effects of, on spirituality, 92–93; effects of, on relationships, 93; is often more addictive than hard drugs, 93; causes the Spirit to withdraw, 94; counsel on overcoming, 94–95; regular temple attendance crowds out evils of, 95, 109. *See also* Immodesty

Pride: can deny posterity blessings for generations, 33–34

Priesthood: authority of, a distinguishing feature of Church, 46; indispensable and unique to the true Church, 46; links time and eternity, 47; longings of religious seekers for, authority, 47; restoration of, 47, 84–85; line of, authority goes back in an unbroken chain to Jesus Christ, 48; oath and covenant of, 58–59; neglect of, is a failure to keep covenants, 58–59; how to magnify calling in, 59; is the perfect plan of service, 60; holders of, are agents of the Lord, 61; is the authority to act in name of God, 84

Priesthood session, general, 45

Prophets: are examples of perseverance, 57; elderly, of all dispensations give counsel and testify of Christ, 102–4

R

Redemption of the dead: few, if any, ancestors will reject the message of, 81; work of, in temples follows pattern of vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ, 85; by means of ordinances for, dead are placed on equal footing with the living to accept or reject the gospel, 85

Repentance: must not procrastinate, 15–16; being cleansed by, 94. *See also* Forgiveness

Restoration. *See* Smith, Joseph

Revelation: principle of modern, confirmed, 86; comes with prayer and seeking by Church leaders, 86

Robbins, Lynn G., 35

S

Sacrament: instituted by Christ, 52; partaking of, is a solemn and sacred privilege, 70

Sacrifice: is never convenient, 35–37; is a hallmark of the faithful, 36; made by the widow of Zarephath, 36–37; making, even when destitute, 37; obey the law of, more fully, 38

Saints: have special responsibility to stand in holy places, 70; in Europe, 89–90; in Latin America, 97; all, may be chosen of God, 106–7

Saturday afternoon session, 23

Saturday morning session, 2

Savior. *See* Jesus Christ

Scott, Richard G., 30

Scriptures: can be likened to each of us, 5; provide sufficient defense and witness of Joseph Smith, 8–9; teach children through daily study of, 13; study of, is a key element in missionary preparation, 71

Second Coming: need to prepare for, 54

Service: motivation for, 10; of senior missionaries, 41–45; conferral of priesthood constitutes a covenant of, 52; in magnifying callings, 59; priesthood is the perfect plan of, 60; promise to those who give, 62; every act of, increases spirituality, 96

Smith, Joseph: 200th anniversary of the birth of, 8, 83; Book of Mormon and other scriptures provide sufficient defense and witness of, 8–9; Restoration through, 10–11; life and teachings of, brings greater understanding of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, 11; shows kindness to upset Nauvoo schoolchildren, 28; First Vision of, 38–41; through

testimony of, we can come to believe in Jesus Christ, 40; God spoke to, for purpose of blessing all of His children, 40; was a courageous young man with unshaken faith in God, 40; had communed with many prophets and heavenly messengers, 49; perseverance of, made the Restoration possible, 57; was subjected to constant contempt and ridicule, 57; was a great friend to many, 78; great things that God has revealed through, 83–87; received incomparable outpouring of knowledge, gifts, and doctrine, 86; restorer of all things pertaining to millennial kingdom of God, 89

Sorensen, David E., 74

Spirit. *See* Holy Ghost

Spiritual gifts: in the Church today, 7; of knowledge and belief are keys to developing a testimony, 39; of faith in Jesus Christ, 40; of faith and confidence are among the Lord's tender mercies, 105; the Lord eager to bestow, upon all Saints, 107

Statistical Report, 26

Stories: of Harold B. Lee counseling Boyd K. Packer to walk by the light of faith, 6; of an African scientist finding the gospel, 9; of Clara McMaster writing "Teach Me to Walk in the Light," 14; of a dying rich man with wrong priorities, 16; of a father laying his business aside and taking his sons to the circus, 21; of a family's journey to Zion despite challenges of cholera, 21; of Clark Monson learning about praying for others from his father's example, 22; of tragedy that follows criticism of paperboy, 22; of a man's 40-year absence from Church after a teacher spoke to him unkindly when he was a boy, 27; of Joseph Smith helping and cheering schoolchildren, 28; of James E. Talmage helping a family of strangers stricken with diphtheria, 29; of a mission president's wife overcoming fear of sharing the gospel with a close relative, 32; of a great-grandfather taking his posterity out of Church activity, 33–34; of a loving stake president devoting time to his personal ministry, giving counsel and

priesthood blessings, 35; of Gordon B. Hinckley teaching hurricane victims about tithing, 37; of the depiction of the First Vision on a stained-glass window awakening belief in young Dieter F. Uchtdorf, 38–39; of couple missionaries, 42–44; of Heber C. Kimball blessing his family before leaving on mission, 48; of Charles Wesley breaking with John Wesley over the authority to ordain, 48; of the Holy Ghost warning an FBI agent of danger, 49–50; of a young man who will enter priesthood service without a spiritual handicap, 53; of Marie and Pierre Curie persevering through hundreds of attempts to isolate radium, 56; of Lorenzo Snow being saved from drowning in Hawaii, 56; of Alma Smith giving a lifetime of Church service, 56–57; of George L. Nelson serving as a home teacher until his death at 101, 57; of Thomas S. Monson fellowshiping Harold G. Gallacher, who eventually returns to Church activity, 59–60; of the Gingerbread House Project renovating the home of a widow, 60–61; of bishops taking Aaronic Priesthood youth to the Martin Harris home and grave of pioneer John P. Malmberg at Clarkston, then to Logan Temple grounds, 61–62; of Joseph Smith Sr. communing with the Lord in the Kirtland Temple, 68; of a wife showing her husband how to lead a colt, 73; of serving a mission and observing the Word of Wisdom preparing David E. Sorensen for leadership in military service, 74–75; of a father loaning a spare tire to a stranger, 77; of Joseph Smith giving money to a family whose house was burned by enemies of the Church, 78; of a new member feeling the Spirit after being baptized and confirmed by Henry B. Eyring, 79; of L. Tom Perry discussing tithing and the Church with a European man on a train, 88; of sister missionaries in Europe leading family to Jesus Christ by inviting them to read the Book of Mormon, 89–90; of a reactivated young single adult in Europe sharing the gospel with many, 90; of a young woman in Hamburg, Germany, seeking spiritual meaning in life and meeting missionaries, 90; of a hus-

band and active Church member addicted to pornography, 93; of David A. Bednar receiving comfort from hymn “Redeemer of Israel” before first general conference address, 104–5; of the Lord’s tender mercies to a wife and mother whose husband was killed in Iraq, 105–6; of a priesthood leader following prompting he received in a dream and counseling Aaronic Priesthood youth on missionary preparation, 106

Suffering. *See* Adversity

Summary of conference music, 110

Sunday afternoon session, 87

Sunday morning session, 67

Sustaining of Church officers, 24

T

Television: often depicts immoral heroes and heroines, 19

Temples: sealing of families in, 16; building of, lessens Satan’s power on earth, 57; are our most holy places, 68; covenants and observances of, secure holiness of character, 69; profound spiritual knowledge is found in, 69; covenants may be renewed in, 69; regular attendance in, crowds out evils of pornography, ensures proper living, and strengthens marriage, 95, 109

Testimony: growth of, requires time and nourishment, 7; Light of Christ kindles, in youth, 71; many of our deceased ancestors already have a, 81; elderly prophets of all dispensations bear powerful, 102–4

Tithing: God tithes His people to bless them, 17; should be paid even when people are destitute, 36, 37; the poor can’t afford *not* to pay, 37; story of Gordon B. Hinckley teaching hurricane victims about, 37; gratitude for a mother who taught about, 37–38; is the Lord’s law for financing His Church, 64, 88

Trials. *See* Adversity

U

Uchtdorf, Dieter F., 38

W

Wealth: reliance on, does not lead to salvation, 16; seeking, destroys hope in Christ, 100–101

Wirthlin, Joseph B., 27

Wickedness: is found in emerging secular societies, 88; use of pornography is, 92–93

Wisdom: Book of Mormon is an endless treasure of, 8; in conference talks is a blessing, 101; parents are a source of, 102

Whetten, Robert, J., 95

Word of Wisdom: observing, helps prepare David E. Sorensen for leadership in military service, 74–75

Worthiness: is required for the companionship of the Holy Ghost, 51; standard of, has been raised for missionaries and adults, 71, 72; we must use our agency to prove, 86

Y

Youth: Joseph Smith was a friend to, 39; should be taught about sacred ordinances and covenants, 62; study cites the faithfulness and doctrinal knowledge of the Church's, 66; leaders must increase efforts to see that every young man is ordained to priesthood offices, 71; must be taught the gospel in its simplicity and power, 71; parents, teachers, and leaders must kindle the Light of Christ in, 71; must be reminded of their divine parentage and of valiant choices in the premortal life, 73; all members to support and assist, in their callings, 73; can stand up to evils of world, 109

Z

Zion: branches and wards take on the spirit of, when members care for one another, 78

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